

# THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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# God became flesh

Scripture tells us that the Son of God, also called Word of God, became *flesh* and dwelt among us.<sup>1</sup> That is, Jesus became a human being and assumed a human nature like ours.

## What does becoming flesh mean?

When God created Adam, he didn't have a sinful nature. However, after he rebelled against God and ate the forbidden fruit, his whole nature became corrupted—sinful. His sin spread to the entire human race.

The term *became flesh* is a loaded term. It refers to our *sinful* nature. *When Jesus assumed flesh, He took Adam's (and our) sinful nature.*<sup>2</sup> In other words, He had the potential to sin *even though He Himself never sinned.*

When we say Jesus came in the flesh, we are saying that He entered our sinful condition—our darkness, alienation, selfishness and depravity. That means He entered into Hitler's, Judas Iscariot's, terrorists', murderers', abusers', yours and my sinful condition. He sank that low in order to redeem us.

## Why did Jesus assume our sinful nature?

The answer is so that He could redeem and heal our sinful nature. *If Jesus hadn't assumed our sinful nature, our sinful nature wouldn't be healed.* Theologian Gregory of Nazianzus puts it thus: *"that which He has not assumed He has not healed."* This is why He assumed our fallen nature.

Jesus *overcame* our sinful nature throughout His life on earth—day and night, hour by hour, moment by moment—not just on the cross.<sup>3</sup> He healed and *recreated* our nature so that it is holy, righteous and perfect. Of course, He also died and paid the penalty of our sin which is death.

Jesus was tempted at all points like us.<sup>4</sup> The devil tempted Him in the wilderness for 40 days. He threw all sorts of temptations at Him—twisting scriptures, offering worldly power, riches and fame. The religious people also attacked Him all too frequently. Even His own disciples got on His nerves occasionally. The climax of His suffering came when He was arrested, crowned with thorns, ridiculed and mocked, lashed and stripped and crucified on the shameful cross.

Jesus *overcame* every temptation that the devil, the religious people and the world hurled at Him. Assuming our sinful nature, He *overcame* them all. That

by  
Dr. P.  
Sellappan

is how He healed our sinful nature. That is how we become holy and righteous in Christ. That's why God calls us holy and righteous.

## Spirit of Antichrist

Some Christians dismiss the idea that Jesus came in the flesh—that He assumed our sinful nature. Their reasoning is: if Jesus had assumed our sinful nature, He couldn't be holy and therefore He couldn't save us.

While their concerns may be justified, the scripture tells us that Jesus did actually assume our fallen nature and overcame it. The author of Hebrews puts it thus: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have *one who*

*has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He did not sin.*"<sup>5</sup> *Jesus loved God with all His heart, mind and soul from the depth of our sinful condition. He was totally faithful and obedient to God from the depth of our depravity.*

If we say Jesus didn't assume our sinful nature, we are saying that He never had to struggle with sin—that He had it easy. If that was the case, He couldn't have healed

*"Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God."*

our fallen nature. To repeat: *that which He has not assumed He has not healed.*

As a human being, Jesus had the capacity to sin like us. *He descended into our sinful condition, and from there He obeyed God, resisting every temptation that was hurled at Him.* He loved righteousness and hated lawlessness.<sup>6</sup> That is how He healed our sinful condition.

The Apostle John warned the early Christians not to believe everything that preachers say. That is good advice for us today. He wrote: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: *Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.* This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."<sup>7</sup>

Because Jesus descended into the abyss of our sinful condition, He knows the struggles that we go through—fears, doubts, broken relationships, sickness and death. He has redeemed and healed our fallen condition, so we can go boldly to the throne of grace<sup>8</sup> and ask for His love, joy and peace. Let's thank Him for His love from the bottom of our heart. □

<sup>1</sup> John 1:14

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:3

<sup>3</sup> John 16:33, Hebrews 10:14, Revelation 5:5

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 4:15

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 4:15

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 1:9

<sup>7</sup> 1 John 4:1–3

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 4:16

# THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding



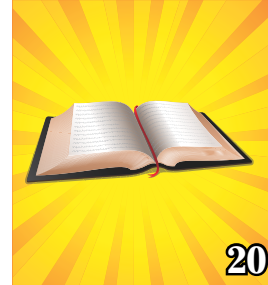
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# What our readers say:

THE PLAIN TRUTH provides information that broadens my horizon. This has been the most favourite reading material in my family. Thanks for the great job.

**Edditha Samuel**  
**Kota Marudu**

The cover article "The empty tomb-what's in it for me?" (Apr-Jun 2012 issue) is excellent. It shows the incredible future that we have in Christ. It gives us real hope.

**Jaya**  
**Damansara Utama**

The articles are enlightening and I enjoy reading and sharing it with others too. God bless your outreach ministry.

**Florence Wong**  
**Singapore**

The articles are thought provoking and relevant in today's context. It is good reading for a growing Christian like me. Thank you very much and God bless you.

**Maria Goh**  
**Singapore**

I have learned so many good things from THE PLAIN TRUTH. My friends are also reading it and they too have discovered many exciting things. Keep up the good work.

**Thangaloo S P**  
**Sandakan**

The articles are interesting and I am able to share them with both my Christian and non-Christian friends.

**Bun Pui Yoke**  
**Singapore**

I get to live like a child of God by His strength. It is easy to understand and is very good!

**Debbie Gan**  
**Klang**

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me and my family to understand Christianity better. May God bless all the Plain Truth staff.

**H A Lim**  
**K Trengganu**

Every article is truthful. I have learnt many things from the magazine. There is no other magazine that can compare with it.

Thank you very much.

**James Lee**  
**Singapore**

I have been receiving THE PLAIN TRUTH for many years. I think it is a wonderful magazine. I would appreciate receiving the magazine always.

**Deljeit Singh**  
**Kuching**

THE PLAIN TRUTH has enlightened my Bible knowledge. The articles are well-written and inspiring. It is a very good Christian magazine for those who truly want to know God.

**Lily T Y Yong**  
**Kudat**

The articles in THE PLAIN TRUTH are enlightening and challenging. Thank you for your commitment towards producing a Christ-centered publication! You will only know the results of your effort when Jesus returns again. God bless you!

**Mark Kosinski**  
**Melaka**

THE PLAIN TRUTH has opened my eyes to see and understand the many wonderful things in the bible. I'm encouraged to spend more time reading God's word as my understanding of it has improved with the help of THE PLAIN TRUTH.

**Yong Thiam Siew**  
**Petaling Jaya**

It is very inspirational reading. Thanks a million.

**Syra George Mokunjl**  
**Sandakan**

The stories and quotes are marvelous. It strengthens my relationship with God. I never fail to enjoy reading it.

**Clarence Ying**  
**Singapore**

THE PLAIN TRUTH is thought provoking and educational. It provides me great solace and encourages me in time of stress.

**Lee Wai Kok**  
**Singapore**

First of all, I would like to congratulate the team for the wonderful magazine. I would also like to sincerely thank all of you for

sharing the magazine that has changed my life and the lives of my family. It has helped us to understand God's word better.

**Ho Nee Yong**  
**Kulim**

THE PLAIN TRUTH has enlightened me on many issues. It has brought me out from a tunnel of ignorance into the Lord's Love, Grace and Compassion. Thanks for a really great magazine. Enclosed is my contribution towards the furtherance of your mission in God's work.

**Chia Thien Soon**  
**Kemaman**

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me to be aware of God's goodness and His plan for mankind. I used to send donations but I am sorry I cannot send now due to my current financial problems, but I will as soon as I get a job. Thank you for your mission!

**Chua Fui Foong**  
**Sandakan**

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# The fire in Cambodia

After a casual talk, I signed up for a mission trip to Cambodia with eight others from the New Covenant Church (tNCC). This was my first mission trip even though I had once been to a refugee camp at the Myanmar-Thailand border about four years ago.

The New Covenant Church, in partnership with the Institute of Church Planter, Cambodia (ICPC), has been involved in training *kampong* (village) church leaders in Cambodia since 2010. It sponsors their training so that they are better equipped to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with their *kampong* folks as well as to plant new churches. The project has proven to be a huge success as evidenced by the fruits it has borne since



by  
**Dr. P.  
Sellappan  
and tNCC  
team\***

took a boat to our destination (Picture 1).

An excited congregation of about 50 (including children) were waiting for us. They were happy to see us even as we were happy to meet them. They ushered us to their 'high rise' church building (Picture 2). After a brief introduction, we began our service with songs, prayers and testimonies and then a short message by one of our team members. We introduced a new song in English which they picked up very fast. They had brought with them their Khmer-version bibles (as English is not their language). Pastor John, an ICPC graduate, did the translation. After service, we had titbits, fellowship, photo sessions and farewells. This time, instead of taking the boat, we walked a kilometre through rice fields to our van.

Another bumpy ride and we reached our hotel in Kampong Thom. We had a good shower to wash off the thick layer of dust that we had collected along the dirt road. We ended the day with an enjoyable dinner and fellowship.

It was a tiring day, but it was a good one as we witnessed the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these *kampong* folks. Many are coming to know who God is and who they are in Christ [children of God]. They are excited about their calling and are on fire for God. A small fire no doubt, but it is slowly but surely sweeping through the *kampong*. While many are poor materially, they are rich spiritually—they are



Picture 1: Boat ride to first *kampong* church

its inception. It is a good example of what churches can do to fulfil Jesus' great commission—to preach the gospel to the ends of the world and to make disciples.<sup>1</sup>

In the rest of the article, I will share some highlights of our trip.

We left Kuala Lumpur on a Saturday and returned home the following Saturday. So we had one full week in Cambodia. Our hosts at ICPC were very gracious. They welcomed us at the Phnom Penh international airport and from then on took care of all our transportation throughout our stay in Cambodia.

Our itinerary consisted of three parts: visiting three *kampong* churches in the northern province of Kampong Thom, teaching at ICPC and visiting an orphanage in Phnom Penh.

**Day 1 (Saturday):** After unloading our heavier luggage at ICPC, we backpacked and set off for Kampong Thom. It was a rough ride as some stretches of the two-lane highway were undergoing major repairs. We made several stops along the way which included eating a nice lunch in a cosy (Malaysian-owned) restaurant.

Approaching Kampong Thom, we exited to a dirt road to our first *kampong* church. After a bumpy ride, we parked our van, walked some distance and then



Picture 2: First *kampong* church

experiencing God's love, joy, peace and freedom.

**Day 2 (Sunday):** After breakfast, we set off for our second *kampong* church. After an hour of drive on a dirt road, we reached our destination. Another 50 or so excited members (including the *kampong* chief and *kampong* police) welcomed us. This time the service took place in an open-air tent (Picture 3). After the usual introduction, we began our service with songs, prayers and testimonies, followed by another message. Pastor Dim, another ICPC graduate, translated the message. As before, service was followed by titbits,



Picture 3: Service at second *kampong* church

fellowship and photo sessions (Picture 4).

Again, we witnessed the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these folks. Many are hearing and responding to the gospel and experiencing the grace of God. They too are excited about their calling and are on fire for God.

After a quick lunch, we headed for our last *kampong* church on our itinerary. After some wrong turns, we



Picture 4: Second *kampong* church

finally reached our destination. Another 50 members ushered us to their 'high rise' church building. We sang, prayed, shared testimonies and gave a message. We also took the Holy Communion (Picture 5). It was a moving service. Pastor Wouti, another ICPC graduate, translated the message. More goodies, fellowship and photo sessions (Picture 6) and farewells followed.

As in the previous two churches, they too are on fire



Picture 5: Holy Communion in third *kampong* church

for God. Hungry and thirsty for God, they are excited about their calling and the hope they have in Christ.

The three *kampong* visits were inspiring. We witnessed God's Spirit working powerfully in these people's lives. They are experiencing God's grace, love, joy and peace.

We were total strangers and we could not speak each other's language, but we all spoke God's language of love.



Picture 6: Third *kampong* church

**Day 3 (Monday):** Having concluded our *kampong* visits, we headed south for Phnom Penh. We made several stops, enjoyed the scenery, and had a delicious lunch in a nice restaurant facing a picturesque lake. Some of us got to sample exotic dishes like crickets (John the Baptist would have loved it too). After reaching Phnom Penh, we collected our luggage and checked into our hotel. It was a welcome change. We enjoyed the clean hotel atmosphere, had a good rest



Picture 7: Session in progress

and good dinner and fellowship.

**Days 4-7 (Tuesday-Friday):** We spent the next four days teaching at ICPC from 9 am to 5 pm. There were 36 of them in the class—men and women drawn from various *kampongs* throughout Cambodia. Most are in their 20s and 30s, but some are also in their 40s. Our teaching assignment included covering just two books—Ruth in the Old Testament and Ephesians in the New Testament. The sessions were lively and were



interspersed with songs and prayers (Picture 7).

The class had brought their own Khmer-version bibles. Pastor Sam, a dedicated Christian leader and staff of ICPC, did the translation. In Ephesians, we focused on three main themes—our *position* in Christ (forgiven, accepted, adopted and seated at the right hand of God as His beloved children), *living* our new life in Christ (loving, caring, serving), and *standing* our ground against the wiles (deceptions) of the devil.

In Ruth, we focused on the *kinsman-redeemer* theme—how Boaz’s love and redemption of Ruth pictured Jesus’ love and redemption of His church. One of the class assignments included enacting the story of the book of Ruth. The class was divided into two groups and each group had to do a skit using whatever



Picture 8: Celebrating Pastor Sam’s birthday

props they could get. They were given just one day, but they did an excellent job. Both groups received prizes.

The last day happened to be Pastor Sam’s birthday. So we celebrated it with songs and cakes (Picture 8). We concluded our training by praying for each other—we prayed for the class and the class prayed for us. This was followed by more photo sessions (Picture 9) and hugging. It was a very moving moment and we could sense God’s love all around us. We bid them farewell and headed for the orphanage.

The lady manager at the orphanage welcomed us. There were about 30 boys and girls. After a brief introduction, we had a short service with songs and prayers. We taught them a new song in English packed with actions which they picked up so fast. Our team leader told a bible story—the healing of a lame man—using illustrative posters. We ended the service with more goodies, photo sessions and farewells.

Back to the hotel, we had the whole evening to ourselves. We shopped, dined and visited places including the popular tourist spot—the Mekong River lined with hotels and restaurants.

**Last day (Saturday):** After a leisurely breakfast, we packed our stuff, ate our lunch, checked out, and left for the airport. Our hosts had been gracious throughout the trip. We bid them farewell and flew home.

#### Some thoughts

I hardly knew my team members before. However, after mixing with them for one whole week, I got to know them quite well. Staying together, eating together, doing things together, caring for one another, and roughing it out together really brought us so much closer—we

experienced real community. Isn’t that what God is doing with us? He is calling people from diverse backgrounds and building a community that will live in union and communion with God and with one another forever.

The people of Cambodia are definitely leaving their sad past and are moving forward to becoming a prosperous nation. They are smart, hardworking, resourceful, and friendly. They are eager to learn and adapt to new ideas and technologies. It is just a matter of time that they too will catch up with their neighbours.

There is definitely a spiritual awakening in Cambodia. The ICPC class of 36 church leaders, selected from 36 *kampongs* throughout Cambodia, is a good example of the spirit of Cambodia. They are smart, active, passionate and eager to know God and share the knowledge of salvation with their *kampong* folks. The group that we taught is just one of the many batches. ICPC has already graduated many batches and there are many more to come. With each batch reaching 36 *kampongs*, all of Cambodia will soon hear the gospel and be transformed. Surely, God has visited them.

While Cambodia may be a little behind in terms of infrastructural development, she is way ahead in her spiritual journey compared to some of her neighbours. She is hearing the good news of Jesus and the fire of the Holy Spirit is slowly but surely sweeping through the *kampongs*. Many are discovering their true identity in Christ. While life may still be hard for many, they are nevertheless experiencing God’s grace, love, joy, peace and freedom. They are full of hope, not just for a better Cambodia but also for a better world where all people



Picture 9: The ICPC class with the mission team

will dwell together in peace, unity and harmony as brothers and sisters. And God promises that it will be so.<sup>2</sup>

Our trip to Cambodia was both memorable and inspiring. We came home very blessed. And we thank God for the opportunity that He had given us. □

\*Hooi Shyen Woon (team leader), Hing Ching Shong and Caryn, Patrick Lim and Marie and Kenny, Thomas Nyanat, George Low

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 21:4-6

# There's oil on your property!

Did you know that you have received unimaginable riches from God? Do you realise that you may be living in poverty because you are not aware of this and therefore you are not taking advantage of the great storehouse of resources that is at your disposal?

What am I referring to? Is this just another of those “feel good”, “name it and claim it” prosperity articles? What are these unimaginable riches?

There is a New Testament letter that teaches us about this magnificent subject. It tells us what we possess and how we can claim and enjoy our possessions. It has been called the “Christian’s Riches in Christ” and “The Treasure House of the Bible”. It is the letter the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians. (Words like “riches” and “inheritance” appear many times in Ephesians.) He opens his letter with an outburst of adoration as he unfolds before us one of the most glorious and staggering statements in all Scripture! Ephesians 1:3 is basically about the new life we have as Christians:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

This verse is rich with meaning. We actually need many hours to discover what Paul is saying but even then we will never fully comprehend it. The more we dig, the more gold nuggets we discover! So let’s do some digging and look at just three relevant aspects from this loaded passage.

1. These spiritual blessings are for us now. We don’t have to continually ask God for them because He “has blessed” us with them. These treasures are not simply promised; they are possessed. Of course we still have to grow in maturity as we are being transformed into the image of Jesus, but as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:21–23: “...all things are yours.”
2. No spiritual blessing has been withheld from us. God has graciously blessed us with “every spiritual blessing”. In 2 Peter 1:3 we learn that “Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us.”
3. These spiritual blessings are “in Christ”. Every blessing we enjoy comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. To be “in Christ” means that we are united to Him and therefore we share in the life of the Son of God. What He has we have. His riches are our riches. His inheritance is our inheritance.<sup>1</sup>

by  
**Gordon Green**

What are these spiritual blessings? You can sense Paul’s excitement as he begins to describe some of them in Ephesians 1:4. In fact he is so inspired that for the next ten verses he neither pauses for breath, nor (in the original Greek) punctuates his words with full stops! One author likens these verses to “a snowball tumbling down a hill, picking up volume as it descends.”<sup>2</sup> Included in Paul’s list is redemption, adoption,

forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. But it is a partial list. Elsewhere we learn that we are beyond condemnation,<sup>3</sup> justified,<sup>4</sup> and we will never be abandoned.<sup>5</sup> The list goes on and on. No wonder these are called “endless treasures” and “inexhaustible riches.”<sup>6</sup> Awesome things have happened to us because of Jesus Christ!

How can we deeply grasp, appropriate and enjoy these riches that God lavishly pours upon us?

- Don’t first focus on the blessings. Instead, focus on the source. It is only as we get to know Jesus (not just about Him) that we can really participate in these blessings because He doesn’t only give us His riches—He is them! He is our peace<sup>7</sup> our comfort<sup>8</sup> our power and wisdom.<sup>9</sup> He is love.<sup>10</sup> The more we talk and listen to Him the more we will enjoy His endless treasures.

- Realise your position and spiritual wealth in Christ. Allow this to change the way you see yourself. For example, another spiritual blessing is acceptance. Do you worry about being accepted by others? Do you fear rejection? Don’t. God has accepted you unconditionally! Do you feel like a failure? Don’t. God embraces failures!<sup>11</sup> Doesn’t this fill you with immense gratitude? So be what you are and ...

- Praise God daily. The whole opening paragraph in Ephesians chapter one is a song of praise for who God is and who we are because of the wonder of what God has given us in Jesus Christ. Because of Him we are rich!
- Ask God regularly to give you insight so that you can grasp the depth and fullness of these spiritual riches!<sup>12</sup> This will change your whole life!

There is no need for us to live in spiritual poverty. There is oil on our property. All the money in the world can’t compare to the spiritual riches we have. United to Jesus Christ you and I have the things money can’t buy! □



<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:16–17

<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p.32.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:1

<sup>4</sup> Romans 5:1

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 13:5

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 3:8

<sup>7</sup> Romans 16:20

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:3–5

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:24

<sup>10</sup> 1 John 4:16

<sup>11</sup> Luke 15:11–31

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 1:18



# Renewed in Christ

In the early days of his ministry, John Wesley (the 18<sup>th</sup> Century minister and theologian who was a founder of the Methodist movement) found himself caught up in a constant flurry of busyness and activity. To do a better job of being closer to God, he decided to add an “extractor diary” in his life, in which he evaluated, measured and rated his daily devotions. His intention was that in so doing he might improve his devotion to God, and please God more.

He found that, not only did he not experience a greater closeness to God, but the opposite happened—he experienced a deepening despair. Slowly, over time, he began to see that his approach was back-to-front.

He was working hard trying to please God—thinking if his devotions were good enough, if he tried hard enough, if he did more, God would be pleased and accept him. But God had already accepted him in

Christ. When he began with God, rather than himself, he saw that the fundamental starting place was God’s love, God’s eternal “yes” to him in Christ. This was the first step on the journey, not the end of the journey.

He came to see that the chief characteristic of the Christian life is gratitude—for what God has already done in Christ—rather than duty and devotion, as he had thought, trying harder and harder to appease and please a perfect but distant Being.

Many of us have shared a similar Christian experience. Indeed, this seems to be a fairly common Christian journey. It’s a journey simply described as one from legalism to grace.

Spiritual renewal is not found in forcing ourselves to try harder, to work more at our devotions, to judge ourselves (and others) more harshly. It is found in encountering Christ. Renewal is always in Christ.

Renewal starts with God, as He has revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ, not with ourselves. “This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”<sup>1</sup> As someone put it, renewal is always found as a “grace reunion”. That is, it is in discovering or rediscovering the joy of God’s kindness and love, expressed to us in Christ. All grace is the love of God in

by  
**John McLean**

our lives through Christ by the Spirit.

In grace, God comes to us in Christ and invites us to share in that wonderful, happy, creative, loving communion of Father, Son and Spirit. Renewal in Christ is therefore always about communion, too.

God is love, and has His Being-in-Communion. This is not just some obscure theological sounding point. It is the starting place, the foundational principle, the divinely energising system of the universe. As C. S. Lewis wrote, God is not a “managerial” God, a Being whose function is to “run” the universe as a manager might run a company, or a headmaster might run a school.

In God there is no loneliness, no need, no hunger that needs to be filled. Father, Son and Spirit have always existed in perfect harmony and fellowship. God, in His divine freedom and love, has chosen not to live

without us. He has created, redeemed and adopted us that we might share in His close, loving fellowship.

Understanding the fact of our salvation enables us to both live into and out of it. In faith, as adopted children, we are free to act like a child of God, loving others as the Father loves the Son. (Rather than thinking that we will become a child of God if we first act enough like one.) This is only possible because our lives are “in Christ”, as His

transforming presence lives in us through the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

In our shared journey of grace, we have come to understand the place of the Old Covenant—that it was given to the nation of Israel, and finds its fulfilment in Christ. We have seen that its contents—days, times, rules and regulations—pointed to and find their true meaning in Jesus. We have grown in a deeper understanding of the nature of God, His triune Being as a God of love and communion.

May we grow in loving God, one another, and all mankind the way the Father, Son and Spirit love one another.

Renewal starts with God, not with us. May we continue to be renewed in Christ, as He dwells in us and we dwell in Him through the Spirit. May we rejoice in gratitude together, remembering that renewal in Christ is grace and communion. □



<sup>1</sup> 1 John 4:10

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 2:20

# Proud to be “Kayla’s Daddy”

During a recent trip to Africa, I had the privilege of following in my daughter’s footsteps, often being introduced as “Kayla’s Daddy.”

It started the day after I arrived. I was standing in front of almost 400 primary students. When the Director

by  
**Rick  
Shallenberger**

On more than one occasion I felt God prompting me, “This is how I often feel about my children. This is how I often feel about you.” It was (and is) a very good feeling. I was watching my daughter do what she is gifted to do—teach and love children. I was reminded that God often feels the same Fatherly pride when He watches us use the gifts He gave us to share His love with others.

Kayla has desired to go to Africa since she was a young girl. She had read a few articles in *National Geographic* about the special needs of the children in several African countries and she determined then and there to go to Africa and make a difference. She put several pictures on her bedroom wall to keep her dream in her heart and mind. Through her teen years she decided her life goal was to make a positive difference in the lives of others, and she has been doing just that for a number of years through music, teaching, drama and using her God-given gifts to love others.

Kayla’s first real opportunity to go to Africa came during her junior year of University. I was asked to put together a proposal to send two women to teach at Young Ambassadors Private Primary School (YAPPS).



of the school introduced me as Kayla’s Daddy, the children cheered. I felt an immediate bond with them because they knew and loved my daughter. I looked at my daughter and my heart swelled with pride. It was the first of many “heart swellings” that would occur during my two-week visit to Africa.

Kayla and a friend, Carrie Smith, have spent the past five months teaching at a private school in Blantyre, Malawi. I was able to watch my daughter teach her class of 67 (yes, you read that correctly—67) students and my heart swelled with pride at her professionalism and the way she handled the class, which was almost three times the size of a normal class in the US. My heart swelled with pride again at church when Kayla and two other women sang special music in Chichewa, the national language of Malawi. And again as I watched Kayla and her friend join the women’s choir, singing and dancing for special music.

My heart continued to swell whenever I watched Kayla take small groups of children who were behind in their lessons, and give them personal attention. And again, as I watched the children swarm around my daughter, as she sang them songs and played games.



When I first mentioned it to Kayla, who was in the third year of her Elementary Education degree program, she jumped at the opportunity. She went with two other

*continued on page 11*



# The gloves are off

by  
**Sue Berger**

**I**t was a beautiful, sparkling day outside as I walked into the clinic. One of the technicians quickly greeted me and gave me a hug. We've gotten to know one another over the years and enjoy catching up on each other's lives during my regular visits. We chat and laugh easily while doing my weigh-in and checking vitals. She jots figures in my chart then pulls a couple of latex gloves from a box on the wall, tugs them onto her hands and gives the top edges a satisfying snap.

Suddenly I feel as if my chair has slid across the room to the opposite wall. I'm untouchable. For some invisible reason, precautions must be taken and barriers have been erected. Neither of us speaks while she pricks my finger, creating the small bead of blood required for the test. After a quick daub with gauze and a little bandage taped in place, my friend peels off the gloves and shoots them into the trash can like rubber bands. We joke that she's had a lot of practice on that shot. Our pre-glove chatter resumes as I follow her into the next room.

Later in the day, I'm still haunted by that momentary feeling of alienation. The simple act of pulling on gloves made me feel rejected, distanced and isolated, even though I understood why my friend had to take precautions. She had taken preventative measures before touching me, even though she had hugged me in the lobby. The mixed message causes me to feel suspicious and distrustful, emotions I have to squelch by reminding myself of the professional reasons involved.

But the feeling is undeniable and as I muse on it, I begin to think of Jesus. (Okay, you knew it was

coming....) What an amazing thing it was to have Jesus walking this earth among us. Born as a human infant. Does it get any messier or more personal than that? He was an unsteady toddler, an exploring child, and a gangly teen. All stages with their quota of bumps, bruises and scrapes, undoubtedly treated, bandaged and kissed by His mother. That reassuring care and human touch is evident in His ministry as He reached out to heal those around Him. Nobody was untouchable. Even those, who for all rational purposes, should have been.

I admit to having great admiration for missionaries who live with quarantined populations and eventually succumb to the same disease. I can think of no greater demonstration of love than to be willing to die alongside our brothers and sisters. And isn't that exactly what Jesus did? Emmanuel. God with us. Here on this earth, mucking it up with the average Joe, experiencing our frailties, touching our diseases, mingling His blood, sweat and tears with ours. No precautions. No alienation. No gloves.

Is it any wonder that the masses were attracted to Him? Nothing repelled Him. Nothing caused Him to draw back from them or avoid them. On the contrary, He was moved by their pain and reached out to touch, hold and heal. He embodied God's desire and will to gather us into His heart, regardless of our human condition.

The gloves are still off today and always will be. And that is very good news for you and me. □

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*continued from page 10*

women, Carrie Smith from Pittsburgh, PA, and Alberta Gibbs from England.

It took only a couple days for Kayla to fall in love with Africa and with the children she was there to teach. The children would swarm Kayla and Carrie, playing with their soft hair, begging for their hugs and asking them to play games with them and teach them songs. Kayla spent much of her free time hanging out with the children and planning more and more ways to reach them. Kayla and Carrie were affectionately referred to as the two *azungas* (white people).

During that seven weeks, Kayla kept asking God "Why am I here? What can I do to make a difference?" and God kept responding through the children, through the members at the churches she visited, and through the school officials. Here's a comment from her blog:

"Word has been spreading rapidly that Young Ambassadors has teachers from America and the UK.... Only one other primary school in Blantyre

(which is the 2nd largest city in Malawi) has "azungas" (white people) teaching, so now Young Ambassadors' reputation is 1 of the top 2 schools in the district! How amazing is that?! I finally understand why they told us that they need us here and why they think it's a blessing that we're here. We truly are making a difference!"

The two weeks I spent with my daughter made up one of the greatest highlights of my life. I was able to watch my child share her gifts and her love with the children, staff and church members in Malawi. Watching her filled me with love and pride. I know now that God was giving me just a glimpse of what he feels when he sees us, his children, use our talents and gifts to share his love and his life with others. □

# God told

“God told me to move my family to Saudi Arabia.”

Alex stared at his friend, wondering if he was just joking or had gone mad. Alex had known Tom for more than 10 years. He'd been best man at Tom's wedding, not to mention godfather to Tom's and Alicia's twin girls. And Alex knew that Tom and Alicia were as cut out for missionary life in Saudi Arabia as toads are for an omelette.

“That's, well, a pretty big decision, Tom. How do you know it's really God's will for you?”

“Well, just a lot of things.” Tom stared deep into his coffee cup. “Pastor Mel's sermon a few weeks ago really got me thinking.” He glanced up at Alex. “We're pretty selfish enjoying the good life here in America while people all around the world need help. I gave it a lot of prayer, and God seemed to answer that we should go.”

Alex nodded thoughtfully, weighing how to respond. “How did God give you that answer?”

“Well, for one thing, I was talking to the Hogarth's, you know, the missionaries in Saudi Arabia. They said they could use some help.”

“What kind of help?”

“Well, you know, I'm pretty good at carpentry, and they said that's just what they'd been praying for—somebody good at carpentry. It was like God was just saying to me, ‘This is what I want you to do, Tom.’”

“What does Alicia think about it?”

“Oh, she's not as excited as I am, but I'm praying she'll come around.”

“Not as excited?” Alex said.

“Well, actually she's dead set against it. She can get pretty hard-headed sometimes. But I think the Lord will show her it's the right thing for us to do.”

“Hmm, I see,” Alex dumped a pack of powdered sweetener into his coffee. “What if He doesn't?”

“He will, Alex. I trust the Lord. And I have a really good feeling about this decision.”

Tom is not unique. Every day, Christians somewhere are convincing themselves that God is telling them to marry a certain person, take a certain job, go to a certain college, or “get out there” and do something really big and meaningful for Him.

But is He—really?

How can we know whether God is really leading us into some major life decision, or whether we are simply frustrated with our current situation and looking for a way out with God's name stamped on it?

Here are a few thoughts God told me to pass along about decision-making. Or maybe He didn't. In any case, here is my two cents' worth. I believe they are a biblically rooted two cents' worth.

When God spoke to people in the Bible, there was no question that it was a message from God. It usually was delivered in person by an angel, and it usually scared the recipient of the message.

When God had to tell people what He wanted them



by  
**Dr. Michael  
Feazell**

to do, it was usually something they did not want to do.

Sometimes, our prayers for God's blessing are really our prayers to get our own way despite what God thinks. Take King Ahab, when he wanted to attack the King of Aram, who had captured some of Ahab's cities. Ahab asked Micaiah the prophet if he'd be victorious. Micaiah told Ahab the truth, even though all the other “prophets” had said Ahab would surely win the battle. Ahab wasn't looking for God's will; he was looking for affirmation of his own will. He was doing a bullheaded thing, but he also wanted God's blessing to cover his backside. Well, God is apparently not into covering the backsides of bull-headed people. Ahab attacked the king of Aram and was killed. God doesn't stop us from making stupid decisions when we are determined to make them.

God is pretty clear about what He “tells” us to do: “The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”<sup>1</sup> And for what it's worth, we don't have to go half way around the world to find our neighbours.

One of the reasons we crave to do something “great” for God is that we are unsure of how we stand with Him, and we hope that if we do something “great” like move to a faraway corner of the earth and be a missionary, God will like us more and we can feel better about our relationship with Him. That's not gospel thinking—that's religious thinking. God loves us where we are, and there is a “great” Christian work in our being ourselves in Christ and showing His love to the people we run into every day.

Changing our location does not change us. We can't run away from our problems. If I'm a lazy curmudgeon in Peoria, I'll be a lazy curmudgeon in Bangladesh. If I'm a short-tempered mule with my first spouse, I'll likely be a short-tempered mule with my second, or third, too. If we need to change, we just might need to change our *selves* first, not merely our circumstances. We might need to pray for a clean and godly heart of love, and then take that clean heart wherever life leads us, not where we think there might be more spiritual glory.

Spiritual glory is invisible, don't forget, and it's present in every act of kindness and self-sacrificial love. Geography or possessions have nothing to do with it. If I want to do “more” for God, I might do well to start by being a better husband and father, or wife and mother.





# and me...

Some ordained people give poor advice. Don't think that when a pastor or missionary says, "Hey, I think God is calling you to such-and-such," they necessarily know what they are talking about. "In a multitude of counsellors, there is safety,"<sup>2</sup> says the proverb. We shouldn't take one hyped-up person's opinion as though it were God's sacred word just because it's what we wanted to hear.

God can and does bless us in our decisions without making them for us. God gives us the ability to weigh the factors in our lives, get advice, do some research, study the issues involved and make informed, well-considered decisions. And we should ask Him to lead us.

Wouldn't it be nice to enjoy the godly freedom to say: "Lord, I've got several paths before me, and based on



## Concluding thoughts

"God told me to..." is often a euphemism for "I want to and have decided to..."

It isn't wrong to want to do something and decide to do it. But why not be honest? Why not say: "I have decided to go to Africa and work in a health clinic. Please pray for me." That would be honest.

all the facts as I understand them, here's what I think I should probably do. If there's something I'm missing here, would you show me before it is too late? And if I miss the cue, then please have mercy on me, a sinner and a frequent dumbbell. And one more thing, if this is a trap door instead of an open door, would you mind not letting go of my hand until I get back to where I ought to be? Thanks. Amen." □

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 5:14

<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 11:14

# The T

“One God in three Persons” is the usual explanation of the fundamental Christian belief in the Trinity. The common response to this explanation is “How can that be? It doesn’t make sense.” Granted, “three in one” is not good arithmetic, but Christians, me included, often refer to God as “He”, and sometimes we speak of “the Father”, “the Son”, and “the Holy Spirit” as separate Persons. A further complication is the fact that the Bible does not use the word “trinity”. No wonder people question the Trinity doctrine!

But the Bible repeatedly tells of *one* God and it also refers to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as being different Persons. Even in the first chapter of Genesis we read the words of all three saying, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...”

The Trinity is an undeniable biblical truth even if we can’t comprehend it in mathematical or biological terms. St. Patrick used a three-leaf clover to try to explain the Trinity to his Irish converts—one clover with three leaves. But that explanation still leaves questions that we can’t answer. The Trinity is a *mystery*—something beyond human ability to understand.

I used to think it wasn’t important to study about the Trinity. I couldn’t explain it, and didn’t see what difference it made in my personal life, so I simply accepted the belief. But I have changed my mind. I still can’t explain the “3 in 1” arithmetic, but I have found it enlightening to get a glimpse of the roles that each Person of the Trinity serves in making us into His (Their) image.



by  
**Paul Hailey**

## **The Father: God over us**

God the Father reigns supreme, ruling all creation. He is “over all and through all and in all.”<sup>1</sup> Probably more than we realise, He intervenes in human affairs in unseen ways, from putting thoughts into our minds to orchestrating the setting up and removal of world leaders as He sees fit.

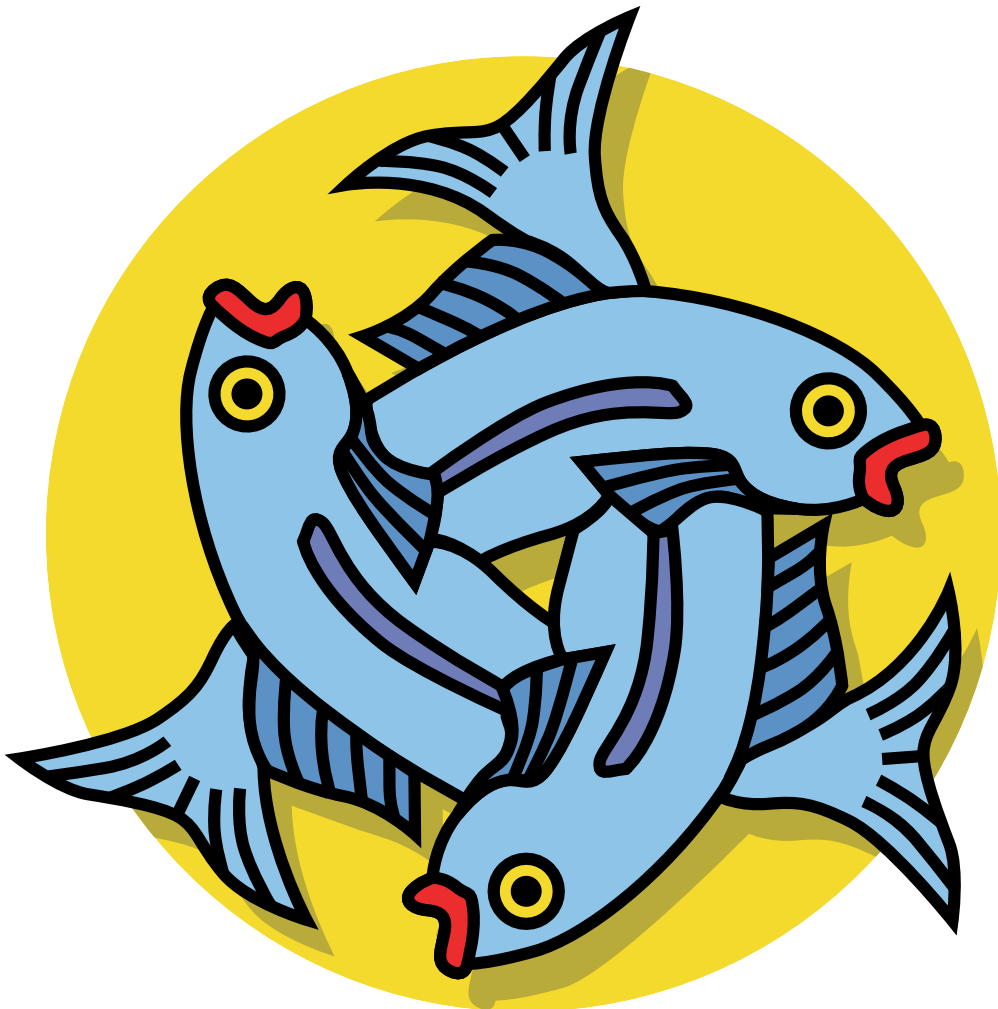
He also oversees our individual journeys to salvation. When we pray we address our Heavenly Father as not only the Father of all creation, but as our loving personal Father who intimately loves and provides for us.

## **The Son: God for us**

Jesus had lived with the Father and the Holy Spirit but about 2,000 years ago He became the “Son” when He was born a man in order to become our saviour. In His short life He demonstrated His unfailing love for *all* humanity by reaching out to people in need. He healed, He fed the hungry, He taught the way to eternal life, and made eternal life possible by His sacrifice and His resurrection from the dead. As “God our Saviour” He remains faithful to lead you and me into everlasting life.

Jesus is now at the right hand

of the Father, still dispensing His unending love. He desires that we experience the good life here and now. “...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”<sup>2</sup> Even now He is ever present with us, in good times and bad. “...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”<sup>3</sup>





# trinity

## The Holy Spirit: God in us

Shortly before Jesus died He told His disciples, "...I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor (or helper) to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be *in* you."<sup>4</sup> The Holy Spirit is active in our minds, enabling us to understand spiritual truths.

The Holy Spirit also gives us spiritual gifts that equip us to serve others. These gifts, listed in various places in the New Testament, include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, wisdom, knowledge, and faith. Through these Spirit-given qualities we can please our Heavenly Father by giving help and comfort to others. The Holy Spirit also comforts us in times of difficulty and gives us assurance of salvation.

Let's be thankful to all three Persons for their unending love in leading us to eternal life.

There is still more we can learn about the Trinity by taking a look at how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to *each other* in perfect love and harmony. Since God has destined us to have an eternal loving relationship with Him and our fellow human beings, let's briefly look at how They interact with each other. In doing this we can better understand how *we* can show love to each other in this life.

## The Trinity: Godly love in action

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit openly express their love for each other. We see an example of this when the Father praised the Son in saying, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."<sup>5</sup> Jesus often stated His admiration for His heavenly Father. Similarly, the Holy Spirit spoke about Jesus. Likewise, you and I please God when we openly show love for each other. We should serve others, speak well of them and rejoice over their accomplishments.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit demonstrate an enduring love, having lived in harmony forever. When Jesus returns we too will be with Him and each other forever.<sup>6</sup> That may be a disturbing thought when we

think of each other's faults! But let's remember, God will transform us from top to bottom, inside and out, removing all of our unpleasant qualities and implanting Godly qualities in us. We will forever have a loving relationship with one another. Even in this life, with God's help we can build enduring love here and now.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit express love by faithfully fulfilling their individual roles. For example, Jesus said, ".....I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent me."<sup>7</sup> The members of the Trinity continue to work together complementing each other in their work of transforming us into their image. We too should strive to work harmoniously together to fulfil the Father's will in serving our fellow man.

In summary, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit love you and me. The Father gave us His Son whom He loves. The Son loved us enough to lay down His life. The Holy

Spirit lovingly and patiently guides us towards holiness and dwells in us, giving us spiritual qualities that enable us to give love to others. As followers of Jesus we too should express love by generously giving our time, abilities, and substance to benefit others.

As the Father, the Son, and

the Holy Spirit declared prior to creation, some day *you and I* will have a total makeover. "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."<sup>8</sup> Then we will understand the mystery of the Trinity. Until then, let's be thankful for God and His (Their) ongoing work in making us into Their image.

With God over us, God for us and God in us, that transformation is absolutely certain.

And, yes, *you* are included. God's plan includes *everyone*. □

*“The Father, Son and Holy Spirit demonstrate an enduring love, having lived in harmony forever. When Jesus returns we too will be with Him and each other forever.”*

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:6

<sup>2</sup> John 10:10

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>4</sup> John 14:16,17

<sup>5</sup> Mathew 3:17

<sup>6</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:17

<sup>7</sup> John 6:38

<sup>8</sup> 1 John 3:2

# A neighbour indeed

**H**ave you ever heard the saying that ‘good fences make good neighbours’? An interesting, but not a very Godly concept! Rather than endorsing barriers, shouldn’t we be encouraging good relationships and understanding with those who live around us?

What a poor indictment on today’s society, that even though we are all made in the image of God, we find it so hard to get along.

I think most of us have heard the story that Jesus told which has become known as the ‘parable of the good Samaritan.’<sup>1</sup> It goes something like this:

“Early one Friday evening, a man was driving on the old Vereeniging highway, just outside Soweto, when his front wheel burst. He was badly injured as he was flung into a ditch alongside the road after losing control of his car.

Behind him, a prominent human rights activist, who saw the accident happen, rode past, thinking ‘if I stop to help I will be in even more trouble with my wife, as I am already nearly an hour late for dinner’.

A few moments later a pastor on the way to a Friday evening youth service saw the accident scene and the man lying in the ditch. ‘I don’t have first aid experience, but I must remember to warn the youth group about the dangers of drunken driving,’ he thought, as he drove on.

The taxi driver saw the injured man and had compassion on him. He used his driving skills to cut across oncoming traffic and pulled over to assist. Even though the man was bleeding profusely, the taxi driver took off his only jacket and placed it as a pillow under the man’s head. He used the last of his airtime to phone for help, and held the man’s hand and comforted him until the paramedics arrived.”

## **Go and do likewise**

The New Testament equivalent of this story was told in answer to the question asked of Jesus by one of the experts in the law: “Who is my neighbour?”

As He so often did, Jesus gets the man to answer his own question, after relating the story to him. The expert in the law answers: “the one who had mercy on him”.

The word translated as ‘mercy’ is defined as: kindness or good will towards the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help them.

Jesus replies that he has answered correctly and that he should “go and do likewise”.

Love and mercy are God’s defining attributes and as we are to grow to be more like Him, this is obviously something that He expects from us too. As followers and ambassadors of Christ, it is expected that we should show kindness and goodwill to others, along with a desire to help them.

The story of the Good Samaritan starts off by Jesus explaining that we should have love for our neighbours. Love is a verb, not just a feeling. James explains

**by  
Tim Maguire**

that our faith needs to be accompanied by actions. “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?”<sup>2</sup> We need to put God’s love into practice; after all, this is what defines us as His disciples.

Who is your neighbour? You probably won’t come across accident victims or those in such dire need of physical help on a regular basis.

Being a neighbour means looking to reach out to the helpless and hopeless. It involves comforting the hurting, the broken, the confused and the wounded. We are surrounded by such people. Those who have committed their heart into a marriage, just to have it trampled on. Those who are living under a life sentence of HIV/AIDS. Those who have turned to alcohol or drug abuse because they have been able to find no deeper meaning in life.

As followers of Christ we realise that the road we travel is hard and many fall by the way, wounded through life’s battle, with little strength or desire to continue. Do we carry with us that ‘drink of refreshing water’ to offer those who are thirsty and weary? Do we think of those around us who are hungry, and donate some non-perishable food items at a collection point? When we see someone with a sour expression, do we smile anyway? Or when an elderly neighbour complains about her aches and pains, do we listen and empathise? She will probably feel much better when she’s told you all her problems. We read in James 1:27 that the kind of religion God our Father accepts as pure and faultless, is to look after orphans and widows in their distress.

In another place,<sup>3</sup> He tells us that He came to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind and to release the oppressed. If we are truly living in and through Him, and allowing God to live through us, our hearts will ache for the things that cause His heart to ache and we will express His love to others.

## **Most hopeless of all**

But perhaps the most hopeless of all are those who have not heard or accepted the Good News and saving grace Christ came to offer.

Recently on a Christian blog I came across a comment by someone of another faith, questioning the divinity of Christ. A more hopeless, lost and wounded neighbour one would be hard pressed to find! Unfortunately the group who answered him did not see the ‘neighbour’ in person and proceed to tell him that unless he found Jesus, he was doomed to spend an eternity in hell, and that they would enjoy watching him roast! Where was he supposed to ‘find Jesus’ if not

*continued on page 17*



# The wake we leave behind

Ruth came to our congregation late in life. She didn't like to give her age, but she must have been in her 80s. Her joy and love for God found expression in prayer and above all in song.

For a while her joy was dented as her sight began to fail and she was told that there was no solution. However, she never missed our weekly service, though she often came wearing odd shoes. We gave her the hymns in large print so she could still join in the singing. When she could no longer see well enough to read those, someone would sit beside her and quickly say the words of the next line of each hymn in her ear.

Ruth lived in an apartment block near the sea. It overlooked a marina crowded with yachts and high-powered cruisers. When visiting Ruth, I noticed that when boats leave the marina too fast, their wake slams the nearby boats around on their moorings and sometimes throws them against the quay, damaging them. The marina puts up prominent warnings: "You are responsible for your wake."

The time came when Ruth could no longer manage living on her own. She had to move to a care home near to a relative, but too far from our church for her to attend. But we could not forget this dear lady. She never preached a sermon, led services, made the tea and coffee, arranged the flowers or any of the other tasks that we may think contribute to the life of a

by  
**Hilary Buck**

congregation.

Ruth's calming wake served to inspire our collective worship. I wish there were a few more like her.



But Ruth was a vital part of that life. From the second row where she always sat, her determination to join in with heartfelt worship was a visible weekly inspiration for all of us. Her worship lifted us. If we were feeling tired or dispirited or were distracted with the problems of the past week, we only had to look at Ruth. We could follow in her gentle, yet spiritually powerful wake.

As Paul explained to the Corinthian church, there are many ways to serve, each according to his or her spiritual gifts. These gifts are not given for personal benefit or individual aggrandizement. The Holy Spirit displays God's gracious power through each member as a means of helping the entire church.<sup>1</sup>

So it was that Ruth's calming wake served to inspire our collective worship. I wish there were a few more like her, gently chugging into our lives, making her presence with humble and persistent dedication. Ruth is no longer with us, but what she gave to us lives on. She was one of those parts of the body that seem to be weaker,

but which are indispensable.<sup>2</sup> □

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:1-7

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:22

*continued from page 16*

in his followers? I'm sure the questioner was left with more doubts than ever before about Jesus' divinity. Where was the expression of love that identifies Christ's followers?

Not only are we all neighbours, but we are all made in God's image and have all been offered adoption into His family. If we are to live together for all eternity, we

had better start learning to live and love one another now!

Who then is my neighbour? When we fully understand this parable, we see that no one is excluded, and that we should show love and mercy to all people! □

<sup>1</sup> Luke 10:25-37

<sup>2</sup> James 2:15-16

<sup>3</sup> Luke 4:18

# Mangoes are not the only fruit

by  
**Mary  
Hammond**

A man named Allen and his family lived in a modest house, on the edge of a small village lying in a lush, green valley. In his neatly-kept front garden Allen planted a mango seedling he had been given by one of his friends. Over the years Allen had lovingly nurtured the plant and gained enormous pleasure in seeing it grow from a straggly seedling to the magnificent, mature fruit-bearing tree that now stood centre-stage in his garden. Proudly standing back to admire the tree heavily laden with large, golden fruit, Allen decided that mango harvesting time had finally arrived.

With a gentle squeeze to one of the ripe-looking fruit, Allen discovered that the mangoes were now ready to pick. He plucked off one of the succulent-looking golden fruit and hurried inside to peel and eat the first mango of the season's crop. He was not disappointed. As the honey-sweet juice trickled slowly down his chin, Allen thought that the crop was so indescribably tasty that it was just too good to keep them all for himself.

So Allen decided to share the fruit with as many of his friends and neighbours as possible.

Soon the news of Allen's delicious mangoes spread across the village. Friends and neighbours called by to admire the crop—all leaving with some of the mouth-watering fruit which Allen gladly shared with them.

But all too soon, all the mangoes were eaten and the tree was bare. However Allen wasn't worried—after all wouldn't next year see another delicious crop?

Time passed and Allen became ill. Sadly he was unable to tend to his garden and the mango tree became neglected, diseased and died.

Then one day, an old man walking by Allen's house noticed the dead tree in the front garden and enquired of its demise. Allen told the old man his sad story, expecting him to offer sympathy—but the stranger's response was far from what he had anticipated.

'Allen, tell me, what is the fruit of the mango tree?' asked the old man.

'Why mangoes of course,' replied Allen, thinking the old man a little odd for asking such an obvious question.

'But that's where you are wrong,' came the reply. The old man continued, 'The fruit of a mango tree is another

mango tree, and another, and another until you have a whole plantation of mango trees! So many, many, thousands of people can enjoy their fruit and there will be no end to sharing the delicious mangoes. But all you and your friends have is just a dim, distant memory of the summer when you shared your first—and last—harvest. You had no real vision of how to share many more of these precious fruit with others. You were all too busy enjoying

what had been produced and no one thought of planting any seedlings for the future.'

Harsh words? Maybe. But a valuable lesson learned—and a parallel which in part could be drawn between Allen's story and our own in publishing *The Plain Truth*. Let me explain.

What would be our answer if we were to ask ourselves, 'What is the fruit of *The Plain Truth*?' Would it be as in Allen's story, to produce something of interest and value only to be short-lived and



*continued on page 22*



# In God's name

In God's name, many wonderful and awe-inspiring things can be done and are being done. We find people full of Godly love caring for the destitute, feeding the starving, caring for the downtrodden, counseling and aiding the troubled in heart. Yet in God's name the worst atrocities are also committed. Those who invoke the name and authority of God should bring with them peace and love yet we find that in many situations throughout human history death and destruction has been the case. There have been crusades, wars, genocides and even some claiming that others do not have the right to exist; all in the name of God by people claiming to defend God.

In centuries past, the Medieval Inquisition was a series of Inquisitions from around 1184 to the 1230's. It was in response to large popular movements throughout Europe considered apostate or heretical to Christianity, in particular Catharism and the Waldensians in southern France and northern Italy. These were the first inquisition movements of many that would follow. Torture became commonplace after 1252. Religious leaders authorised the use of torture by inquisitors. The Inquisitors were forbidden to use methods that resulted in bloodshed, mutilation or death. One of the more common forms of medieval inquisition torture was known as strappado. The hands were bound behind the back with a rope, and the accused was suspended this way thereby dislocating the joints painfully in both arms. Weights could be added to the legs dislocating those joints as well. All this done by 'God-fearing people'!

Today we find murders committed because of religious differences. Those who adhere to one particular religion dislike those who practise worship in another form. Champions of God take it upon themselves to 'do something' to protect the faith. A form of self-righteousness engulfs them that make them think that they have been bestowed with God's authority to defend their God. It is interesting to note that Jesus said that many people who think they are His followers will be rejected by Jesus at the judgment when they attempt to claim that they are His disciples.<sup>1</sup> Not all who claim the name of Jesus are actually His disciples. Similarly not all who claim to speak for God are Godly. It is sad that human atrocities have



by  
**Devaraj  
Ramoo**

now evolved to hating others because they practise a different religion or if they refuse to practise worship the way we say is right.

I have two dear friends who are not Christians. I have known them since my school days and we still stay in touch regularly. Recently, the daughter of one of them suffered a personal tragedy. I spent a long time just being there as a friend, listening and comforting her. I work with colleagues, who are Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and those belonging to other faiths. I meet up with long time friends for dinner who have nothing in common with my faith. Yet their presence enriches my life. I find satisfaction helping them with their concerns. I realise that if I am to call myself a follower of Jesus Christ, accepting others as they are without passing judgment is the best way to achieve peace and harmony in my own life. When we are unable to accept others for who they are, or if we

pass judgment on them or their behaviour, all we are actually doing is indulging in self righteousness.

Jesus spoke of a time of judgment when God will bless the righteous to enter His Kingdom saying "for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.<sup>2</sup> When the righteous were puzzled and asked Him when they had

done all these things for God Himself, the Almighty answered " inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me"<sup>3</sup>

'My brethren' as mentioned by God refers to our fellow human being. Jesus Himself openly declared His willingness to accept anyone needing Him. He invited anyone who was heavy laden with problems and sufferings to come to Him, promising rest for their souls.<sup>4</sup> Moving in God's name never entails killing, torture, hate or destruction. Those who do these things believing that they are serving God have never known God. If we are to speak or do things in God's name we first need to look at ourselves and ask how much of God is present in us for in God's name there is no room for evil. In God's name love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and gentleness towards others should follow. For in God's name we first serve our fellow man. □



<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7:22-23

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 25: 34-36

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 25:40

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 11: 28-30

# Stunning truth

In the movie, “A Few Good Men”, Jack Nicholson plays the role of Colonel Nathan Jessup. Tom Cruise plays Lieutenant Lionel Kaffee, who intensely cross-examines the Colonel in a military trial. Exasperated, the Colonel finally shouts, “You want answers?”

Kaffee rejoins, “I want the truth!” And the Colonel famously responds, “You can’t handle the truth!”

The phrase jars us even as it resonates with John’s Gospel where Jesus declared, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

And that is precisely the challenge: Truth can set us free—but we can’t always handle the truth! The truth is



by  
**Dr. Joseph  
Tkach**

faith.<sup>5</sup>

The truth is that Jesus Christ “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”<sup>6</sup> The truth is that “God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”<sup>7</sup>

The truth is that God’s patience toward sinners is unlimited.<sup>8</sup> The truth is that God “wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”<sup>9</sup>

All this is how God reveals in the Scriptures His heart toward humanity. God made humans in His own image; they became sinners, alienated from Him,



that in Jesus Christ we are already forgiven, reconciled and beloved of God.<sup>1</sup> But in our world of sin-scarred perceptions, we either do not know the truth, and all too often, even if we have heard the truth, we can’t handle it.

The truth is that God loves the whole world, that He sent His Son into the world not to condemn it, but to save it,<sup>2</sup> and that in Christ, God was reconciling all things to Himself. The truth is that Jesus draws all people to Himself,<sup>3</sup> that everything is under His authority,<sup>4</sup> and that He wants everyone to come to

and He, loving them intensely even in their sins,<sup>10</sup> has forgiven and redeemed them through His Son. “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father,” Jesus said.<sup>11</sup>

When we know God the way He reveals Himself, we can say with all assurance of joy, “Therefore, there is [now] no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...”<sup>12</sup> “For God,” Paul wrote, “was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him [Jesus], and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on

*continued on page 21*



# The eyes of Jesus

by  
Tammy Tkach

When Mary looked into the eyes of baby Jesus, she saw God looking back at her. As the Samaritan woman handed Him a drink, she looked into His eyes and saw overflowing grace.

For the widow whose son was brought back to life and restored to her, the look in Jesus' eyes was full of compassion.

His eyes held mercy for the woman whose daughter was plagued by demons.

Jesus' eyes looked out at the crowds, understanding their hunger and their need of a saviour.

His eyes were filled with tears as He looked out over Jerusalem, longing to gather them as a hen does her chicks.

As He watched the guards roll dice for His cloak, He saw their ignorance and His eyes filled with forgiveness.

His eyes closed in death as He said, "It is finished," and gave His spirit back to His Father.

As He spoke with Mary in the garden, His identity was hidden to her, but when He looked in her eyes, she knew Him and saw His love.

On the road to Emmaus, the disciples took the cooked fish from His hands and saw in His eyes how much He cared.

His eyes today are filled with the same love, mercy,

compassion and forgiveness as they were so many years ago. He has eyes that have seen the beginning of the world; eyes that steeled as He planned His eventual coming to earth as one of us and knew what He would have to suffer.

The eyes of Jesus look on all for whom He died with the ancient and ageless sovereignty over eternity—eyes that see the suffering of the human race and shine with eagerness to see His brothers and sisters join Him in life everlasting.

The eyes of Jesus twinkle with warmth and love. They are as irresistible as His invitation to give our burdens and cares to Him. As we look in His eyes, we see no condemnation, no judging and no recrimination for anything we've done. We can look in His eyes without fear, guilt or shame because those eyes see into our hearts and know us.

The eyes of the One who holds the keys of death and the grave are like flames of fire, lighting up the universe with His majesty and holiness. They hold the promise of our future, in perfect relationship with Him, His Father and the Spirit.

The eyes of Jesus are on us, for us and filled with us, the apple of His eye. May we always look back at Him with eyes filled with adoration, love and worship. □

*continued from page 20*

earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross."<sup>13</sup> That includes everybody, even you and me.

In the doctrine of the Trinity, God has shown Himself to be the God who loves the world and who beckons every person to come to Christ and take part in the joy of life in the household of God. There is no person whom God does not want, whom God does not include, whom God does not love.

In Christ, we are all freed from the chains of sin to come to the Father whose arms are open wide to receive us, if only we will. Christ has drawn all humans into Himself, and in Him they can share in His relationship with the Father as the Father's beloved Son. In Christ, we can know and experience the Father for who He really is as our Creator, Deliverer, Redeemer, Father and Friend.

But to most of us, all that doesn't make sense. It can't make sense. It's not fair. It lets evildoers off the hook. It makes a mockery of justice. It's "soft on sin".

We understand—we can handle—condemnation, punishment and retribution, but not carte blanche grace, mercy and forgiveness. We understand—we

can handle—the kind of "truth" that condemns and punishes sinners, but we have a hard time with the kind of truth that forgives them and sets them free.

Until, that is, it affects someone we love. When it comes to someone we love, we can understand it; we can handle it. We long to see our loved ones forgiven and set free, if only they would also have a change of heart.

Well, God loves everybody, and He not only provides the forgiveness and freedom, He provides the new heart. He provides not only grace and mercy; He provides the righteousness of Christ.

That's why the gospel is good news. It is the best and only hope for humanity. It is the best and only hope for you and me and everyone we care about. Human beings can never become righteous on their own. But God can, in Jesus Christ, forgive us, heal our minds, and make us righteous.

That is why we preach the gospel, calling on all people everywhere, as far as the Spirit gives us opportunity, to turn to Christ in faith so they can know Him for who He really is and know themselves for who they really are in Him. □

<sup>1</sup> Colossians 1:20

<sup>2</sup> John 3:16

<sup>3</sup> John 12:32

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 1:10

<sup>5</sup> 2 Peter 3:9

<sup>6</sup> 1 John 2:2

<sup>7</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>8</sup> 1 Timothy 1:15–16

<sup>9</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4

<sup>10</sup> Romans 5:6–8

<sup>11</sup> John 14:9

<sup>12</sup> Romans 8:1

<sup>13</sup> Colossians 1:19–20

# Keeping perspective

Neat and tidy! That's how I like it! A place for everything and everything in its place! I like routine, order, organisation. I like life to run smoothly and at an even keel. Don't rock my boat. Don't rattle my cage. Don't shake my tambourine. Don't upset my apple cart. And don't keep me from marking off a number on my "to-do" list.

Unfortunately, life is not neat and tidy. It's messy. Life is just one inconvenience after another.

Recently one of my best friends died—my computer.

Although I'm not a techie, I love

writing, researching, e-mailing and doing computer stuff.

Picking out a new "best friend" is a daunting task when you aren't computer savvy. Techie friends aren't very helpful because they use terms like CPU, gigabyte, megabyte, and RAM assuming I know what they mean.

When the technician said he might not be able to retrieve my material, I was sad, but not disheartened. After all, being the organised person I am, I had two backups. However, through some fluke, neither of my backups worked. Then I became disheartened. As I write this on a borrowed computer, we still aren't sure if my material can be saved.

Dealing with life's inconveniences can be stressful, time consuming, and overwhelming. Sometimes it's difficult to keep perspective and discern the difference between an inconvenience and a tragedy.

This really came home to me about seven years ago

by  
**Barbara  
Dahlgren**

*"Life is not neat and tidy; it's unpredictable. Major tragedies and minor inconveniences will always abound. I think it's helpful to discern the difference between the two, but if the trial is big or small, God is with us through it all."*

when I got a phone call informing me that my stepsister and her whole family had been killed instantly in a car crash. My "to-do" list fell by the wayside as I flew back to the Midwest for the funeral, trying to comfort my folks though I was heartsick myself.

Suddenly my whole perspective had changed. A flat tire, a snoring spouse, a missed appointment, a late airplane, a lost game, the guy who cut me off in traffic, the gossipy co-worker, the slow Internet connection, the stock market being down, my weight being up or my computer crashing didn't seem like quite as big a deal as it all did before.

Fortunately, God is with us whether our crisis is large or small. His perspective is the one that really counts, because He loves us and knows what is best for us in any given situation. What happens to us is not as important as who we are in Jesus, who lives in us and is our all in all.

Life is not neat and tidy; it's unpredictable. Major tragedies and minor inconveniences will always abound. I think it's

helpful to discern the difference between the two, but if the trial is big or small, God is with us through it all.<sup>1</sup>

More and more, I'm realising that Jesus is not as concerned about my routine, my boat, my cage, my tambourine, my apple cart, or my "to do" list as I am. He doesn't always shield me from life's woes, but He will never leave or forsake me.<sup>2</sup> After all, He is a much better friend than my computer, and His backup never fails!<sup>3</sup> □

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 13:5

<sup>3</sup> John 15:14–15

*continued from page 18*

consumed—and appreciated—by those receiving their requested copies? Or should it perhaps be that the fruit of *The Plain Truth* is to generate more *Plain Truth* readers, who in turn would generate others? And as our readership grows so more people would be encouraged, inspired and hopefully motivated to make changes by the Christian message of hope. And this, dear reader, is where you can help.

If after reading your copy of the magazine you could share it with a friend, family member or colleague, then that act alone could encourage someone else—as well as stretching our limited resources just that little bit further to reach more people at no extra cost.

You see, you never quite know when and how God will use an individual, situation or indeed an article to encourage, inspire or motivate another person. But

what we do know is that God will—and does—use individuals with the resources He provides to spread the Gospel. And that could be you—and with *The Plain Truth*.

At this time—as never before—we see a huge and growing need for the Christian message to be made available to as many as possible in an accessible, uplifting and non-judgemental way. And as you have previously helped us financially, we ask you to please give what you are able at this time of diminishing income to support *The Plain Truth* in its vital ministry.

Thank you again for your continued support of the ongoing work of *The Plain Truth* in sharing the Gospel message today—and enabling it to reach many thousands more in the future. □

<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 2:17

<sup>2</sup> John 11: 25–26

<sup>3</sup> John 11: 38–44



The popular belief is that success comes by commitment and hard work. That's true in the business world. If a person dedicates himself to accomplish something in business, he has every reason to be optimistic about his chances in our free enterprise system. But it doesn't work that way when it comes to our spiritual life. The criterion for measuring success in the world is production. If a person produces impressive results in business, he is considered successful. Successful people have learned what to do to accomplish the desired results. But here is where we get into trouble in the Christian life. Christianity isn't built around performance and production, but is centered on the person of Jesus Christ. When we transfer a worldly approach to experiencing success to our Christian life, it won't work!

**Steve McVey**

It takes quite a spine to turn the other cheek. It takes phenomenal fortitude to love your enemy. It takes firm resolve to pray for those who persecute you.

**Rob Bell**

God's love is relentless in its determination that we be cured of our sins, at whatever the cost to us or to Him.

**C. S. Lewis**

God loves you so utterly and completely that He has given Himself for you in Jesus Christ His beloved Son, and has thereby pledged His very Being as God for your salvation....Jesus Christ died for you precisely because you are sinful and utterly unworthy of him, and has thereby already made you His own before and apart from your ever believing in Him. He has bound you to Himself by His love in a way that He will never let you go, for even if you refuse Him and damn yourself in hell His love will never cease. Therefore, repent and believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord

and Savior....renounce yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus as your Lord and Savior

**Thomas F. Torrance**

When I was young I was sure of everything; in a few years, having been mistaken a thousand times, I was not half so sure of most things as I was before; at present, I am hardly sure of anything but what God has revealed to me.

**John Wesley**

Temporal blessings are not definite marks of divine favour, since God gives them to the unworthy, and to the wicked, as well as to the righteous

**C. H. Spurgeon**

Make it clear. Make it simple. Emphasise the essentials. Forget about impressing. Leave some things unsaid. Let the thing be simplified.

**Charles R. Swindoll**

A youth is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He will assume control of your cities, states, and nations. He is

going to take over your churches, schools, and corporations. You may adopt all the policies you please, but how they are carried out depends on him. So it might be well to pay him some attention.

**Author unknown**

There is not enough darkness in the world to extinguish the light of one small candle.

**Spanish proverb**

Never think you could do something if only you had a different lot and sphere assigned you. What you call hindrances, obstacles, discouragements, are probably God's

opportunities.

**Horace Bushnell**

"I'm a self-made man, you know," explained a certain magnate of modern business to Dr. Joseph Parker, who immediately replied, "Sir, you have lifted a great load of responsibility from the Almighty."

**John Baillie**

I expect to pass through life but once. If therefore, there be any kindness that I can show, or any good thing I can do to any fellow being, let me do it now, and not defer or neglect it, as I shall not pass this way again.

**Stephen Grellet**

*When we are reading, we often find something that attracts our interest. It's not earth-shattering, or life-changing. But it's worth cutting out and keeping, or sticking on the refrigerator door; or maybe sending to us for this page!*

*We invite all our readers to contribute news items, quotes, or poems, that make you say 'Hmm'. It could be in today's paper, or in a book hundreds of years old. Try to send the original clipping, or a copy of the page to:*

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