

THE Plain Truth

MCI (P) 132/05/2013

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Jan-Mar 2016

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of turmoil**

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

ISSN 1675-3100



9 771675 310008

PP 12578/03/2013 (032108)

One death, one resurrection

Many dailies carry an *obituary* column listing recent deaths with their photographs, birth and death dates, and some words of encouragement and hope. Some readers routinely skip this column because it reminds them of their own death.

We wish the dailies also carry a *resurrection* column listing the names of those who had risen to life! That would make great news, but is that really possible?

Well, one's person's death and resurrection has actually made that possible. His name is Jesus Christ. His Script, the Bible, has a resurrection column and the good news is your name is in it!

One for all

Because Jesus is Creator and sustains all things, the entire human race is bound up in him, albeit mystically. Here are some verses to confirm that.

"All things have been created through Him [Jesus] and for Him. He is before all things, and *in Him all things hold together*."¹

"...the fullness of Him *who fills all in all*...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through *all and in all*."²

"For *in him* we live and move and have our being."³

That means all humanity is *included* in his life, death and resurrection.

One death

As Jesus represents humanity, his death is humanity's death.

He took *all* our sins—past, present and future as well as 'light' and 'heinous' sins—into himself and destroyed them on the cross. That is why scripture tells, *when he died we died*.

Apostle Paul tells us, "...one [Jesus] *died for all, and therefore all died*⁴...just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, ... death came to *all* people, because *all* sinned."⁵

Jesus didn't just die *for* us, but he died *as* us. Our old, sinful man died with Christ on the cross. Because he died *our* death, we don't have to live that old, sinful life anymore. That's why Paul tells us, "Therefore, if anyone is *in Christ*, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"⁶ We now live the new life.

One resurrection

Jesus died but he rose from the grave and manifested to his disciples over a period of 40 days in different settings. Then he ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of God in power, glory and majesty.

But he didn't go there *solo* (*alone*). He took all

by
Dr. P.
Sellappan

humanity with him. That means we too are seated with him in power, glory and majesty. While it doesn't appear so, that is what he has accomplished for us. He did that for us, *as* us, whether we believe it or not, feel it or not. That is the truth about our life.

That's why scripture tells us, *when he rose, we rose* and *when he ascended, we ascended*. *He is seated at the right hand of God, and so are we*. That's how God sees us in the *spiritual* realm. Thanks to Jesus who made all this possible.

Paul writes, "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for *all* people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for *all* people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many [all] were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many [all] will be made righteous."⁷

Jesus sums up our life

As a human representative, Jesus has included all in his death and resurrection. What God accomplished for us in Christ is the truth about our life. We call this *objective truth*. It is *not* based on our feelings or experiences.

Our feelings and experiences don't always reflect that objective truth.

We still sin, have pains and aches, and fears and worry.

We call this *subjective*

experience. While our personal experience may still be way off from the objective truth (realized in Christ), we can trust the Holy Spirit to take us ever closer to the objective truth.

Our righteousness is based *solely* on what Christ has accomplished for us on the cross (the objective truth), not on our good works or good behaviour. That means *our salvation is absolutely guaranteed*. Living a Godly life led by the Holy Spirit however will make our life more joyful and satisfying.

In his death and resurrection, Jesus has included the entire human race. We died and rose with him. Waking up to that spiritual reality and participating in *his* resurrection life is what the gospel is about. □



¹ Colossians 1:16–17

² Ephesians 1:22–23; 5:6

³ Acts 17:28

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:14–15

⁵ Romans 5:12

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:17

⁷ Romans 5:17–19

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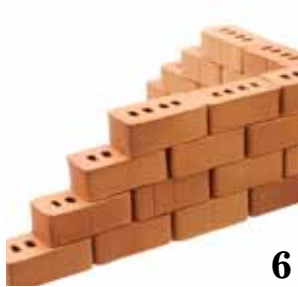
A Magazine Of Christian Understanding



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| Issue No. 1 | Volume No. 15 |
| January–March 2016 | PP 12578/03/2013 (032108) |
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Jurong Point Post Office, P.O. Box 054, Singapore 916402

The Plain Truth is published four times a year as funds allow, and is sponsored by Grace Communion International, which is a member of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia. It follows a non-denominational editorial policy and provides a message of practical help, hope and encouragement from a Christian perspective.
- For Non-Muslims Only -

DONATIONS: Although we do not put any subscription price for **THE PLAIN TRUTH**, we gratefully welcome donations from readers who support our desire to bring spiritual knowledge and understanding to our fellow brothers and sisters.
Cheques should be made payable to 'The Plain Truth' and mailed to the postal address listed above.

Printed in Malaysia by:
Hin Press & Trading Sdn Bhd (71078-D)
No. PT 45855, Batu 2, Jalan Kapar,
41400 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia

ISSN 1675-3100. Copyright Grace Communion International, 2014.

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What our readers say:

Ed: Thank you all for your financial support and prayers for the Plain Truth ministry. It is greatly appreciated. It is a great privilege to participate in Christ's ministry. He loves us dearly and wants us to share this Good News so that all might hear and discover God's lavish grace.

Thank you for sending THE PLAIN TRUTH. It is a wonderful magazine—simple, easy to understand and covers a variety of topics. Enclosed please find a cheque for SGD200 to help defray your printing costs.

Anthony Low
Marine Cres, Singapore

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I thank you for your wonderful dedication and devotion for establishing and publishing this divinely inspired magazine glorifying the name of our Lord, our God. I am sending a small gift to support your ministry. I am the house mother of Sarah's Inn, a halfway home for the destitute women and children, here at Segambut and am serving in the Revival City Street Church International. I hope you all can pay a visit some time. God bless and prosper all that you are doing always. In Jesus' name Amen.

Esther Anita Kaur
Segambut, Kuala Lumpur

I have been an ardent reader of your magazine THE PLAIN TRUTH for many years, and it gave me great insights on how God worked in me and transformed me to be faithful to His teachings. Maybe the time has come to bring in fresh ideas into the magazine. Let us touch the hearts of people to show all the sufferings that are going on around the world e.g. the thousands of migrant people fleeing their homeland, the floods in different countries, earthquakes, families living in poverty, etc. These can be done with pictures or write-ups with captions to get the message across. And to feel light and easy, a page on humour would be great. Let us pray to God to send forth His Spirit to inspire and bless all who sacrifice their time to work in His vineyard. Enclosed is a small donation for God's ministry. Thanks.

William Gomez
Butterworth, Penang

In the July-Sept 2015 issue in the piece

"Who do we reflect?" you wrote: "Jesus removed every obstacle that stood between us and God. He united us with God forever... May we wake up to this reality and bask in his glory." Sir, it seems easier said than done. The question is: how are we to wake up to this reality? Jesus united us with God forever? Do you really feel united? Have you realized God? Please comment.

Durai

Ed: It is a good question. The cross—even its physical shape—appears to be a contradiction. God's promise doesn't always seem to reflect our personal experience. We can look at this apparent contradiction in two ways—objectively (as God sees) and subjectively (as we experience). Your quote from the article tells the objective truth—what Christ has accomplished for us in the spiritual realm. It is true whether we believe it or not, feel it or not. What we experience is the physical or subjective part, which can change over time. That's why God's promise sometimes appears to be a contradiction. 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 tells us: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." Hope this answers your question.

A close friend of mine in Petaling Jaya drew my attention to "The Plain Truth" magazine a few weeks ago and it has drawn my desire to request for a copy. I am an ordained self-supporting Minister of the United Methodist Church based in Kuala Lumpur and am involved in the Preaching and Teaching Ministry in South-East Asian countries covering India Myanmar, Philippines, Australia, Africa and other places in Europe and UK... As your articles are good and very informative, I would be grateful if you could place my name on your mailing list. Warmest regards to you and your staff.

Rev. Dr. Caesar A.
Wellington

I enjoy and greatly benefit from reading THE PLAIN TRUTH and am glad and grateful

to receive it. I also share my copy with my mother when I have finished reading it. Thanks very much to you and your editorial team for a fine job. Many thanks and may God bless you.

Patricia Murugasu

I thank God for all your wonderful effort in making this magazine an enlightenment tool for our spiritual life. Thank God for his amazing work in and through your team! May God's blessing be upon you all.

Mary Melissa Sarimuthu
Nilai

I find the articles very enriching. It has strengthened my faith and also helps me to be more aware of happenings around me. I have banked in RM50.00 into your account—a small contribution towards the good work that you are doing.

Jessie Nathan
Ipoh

Although THE PLAIN TRUTH is sent free of charge, it is not without cost. Each copy is made possible by the generosity of others. So we are very grateful for those readers who send a donation, and make it possible for us to continue to publish the good news of the Gospel. Donations should be sent to the addresses listed on page 3 or sent electronically to the bank account:

The Plain Truth
A/C No: 8001-8514-59
CIMB BANK BHD
Jalan Dato Hamzah (Branch)
12-14 Jalan Dato Hamzah
41700 Klang,
Selangor, MALAYSIA.

We welcome your comments. Letters for this section should be addressed to: "Letters to the Editor", The Plain Truth, P.O. Box 2043, Pusat Bisnes Bukit Raja, Pos Malaysia Bhd., 40800 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. or sent via electronic mail to: ptasiamy@gmail.com The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space.

Easter

Good Friday and Easter set themselves as pivotal dates on the Christian calendar. I say “pivotal” because all that we—as Christians—hope and believe hinge upon the events commemorated on these days.

But then, does it seem strange that we don’t know exactly when they happened?

I know that many people put great emphasis on getting the details of Jesus’ arrest, trial, death and resurrection correct. We know that they happened between the years 30 to 33 AD, but it is impossible to pin down, beyond all doubt, the exact year.

Most orthodox Christians accept that Jesus was crucified on a Friday. However, others insist it was a Wednesday, and some calculate Thursday. Then there are arguments over whether he was in the tomb for three days and three nights or just parts of those days.

Some believe we should not celebrate the Orthodox Christian days at all, insisting that the Old Testament Passover observance is the only correct way to remember Jesus’ sacrifice.

But, is it really so important to know exactly when these things happened? I don’t mean to suggest the details are not significant. The Bible makes it clear that God carefully orchestrated the events of Jesus’ last week so that prophecies of the Messiah could be fulfilled. But there is some ambiguity in the scriptural record.

Writers in the first century did not record events with the same precision that we expect today, so some questions about the timing of events cannot be resolved conclusively. What was most important to them was *what* happened, not *when*.

That should also be our focus today. If, about 2,000 years ago, Jesus was executed, and then later resurrected, the destiny of every human being has been changed forever. If this had not occurred then, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”¹ But Paul reminded his readers that because of Jesus’ resurrection, death had been “swallowed up in victory.”²

“O death, where is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” he wrote.³

Death is an enemy, and we still feel some of its sting when a loved one dies, or when we see innocent people murdered. The great, over-arching promise of Good Friday and Easter Sunday is that Jesus has conquered this enemy.

God orchestrated these events so that they fulfilled the specific prophecies of the Messiah. The writers of the Gospels wanted us to know that this happened.

Let’s remind ourselves of this, wherever, whenever and however we commemorate our Savior’s death and resurrection. ■

by
John McLean

Easter: What’s the big deal?

While I was driving home from work I turned on the radio and heard a reporter ask the following question: “So what’s the big deal with Christ’s death? Sure, crucifixion is painful, but he was only up there for a few hours. It was almost like Jesus just had a bad weekend.”

I was shocked. I’d never heard it put that way!

But the question got me thinking: why is Christ’s death so important? Was it just the amount of physical suffering he experienced? Why is it so special?

I think we can look at it like this...

Christ was betrayed, tortured and crucified. And he did suffer a tremendous amount of pain. But the Bible tells us that there was so much more happening in that moment.

“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation”⁴

Christ’s death wasn’t simply about physical pain. By offering himself as a sacrifice on our behalf, he took on the whole weight of our guilt and alienation from God. He willingly suffered all the consequences of our distrust and disobedience to God.

On the cross, he submitted to the loving and just judgment of God, and our corrupt sin natures were condemned to death in him. He joyfully paid this price so that we could be given new natures, be filled with his life and stand, reconciled to God, with no barriers between us.

And that’s why his death and resurrection are a “big deal!”

As we celebrate Easter, we remember that while Christ suffered physically, let’s not forget that spiritually, his sacrifice brought us back into communion with God. For him, it wasn’t a bad weekend—far from it! This was the weekend of Holy Passion when his great redemptive plan was accomplished! And with that in mind, we really do have something to celebrate!

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:14

² 1 Corinthians 15:54

³ 1 Corinthians 15:55

⁴ Colossians 1:21–22

Just another brick in the wall

My father loved to build. He constructed three rooms under our house, a barbecue, a wishing well and a cave in our back garden!

Recently I drove past my old house and was filled with wonderful memories of my creative father as I saw his meticulous handiwork still standing strong after so many years.

Did you know that our Heavenly Father is also a builder and is in the process of constructing a magnificent building?

The apostle Paul wrote that “God is building a home. He’s using us all... in what he is building... he’s using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day...”¹

What is this all about? Peter reveals more about

this building and describes Christians as “living stones.”²

But exactly what is God building? Let’s consider the characteristics of this building.

Jesus is the cornerstone³

A firm foundation is vital to a building, and a cornerstone is the most important part of the foundation. It is vital for the orientation of the building—it helps to hold the building together, all the dimensions in the building have to be measured correctly from the cornerstone and other stones have to fit into it. God’s building consists of people grounded on Jesus Christ and as the cornerstone he holds it together. This means that this building is oriented around Jesus. Christianity hangs entirely upon Jesus Christ and his resurrection. He is the focal point of the Bible. Whenever you find a difficult scripture, orient it around ‘who Jesus is’ and the rest will usually follow.

The stones are connected to one another⁴

Each stone is harmoniously fitted and connected to the corner stone, the foundation, the roof, to other walls, and to one another. One stone is not a building or even a wall—it’s only when it is joined together with hundreds of other stones that together they make

by
Gordon Green

something beautiful. Mother Teresa said; “You can do what I cannot do. I can do what you cannot do. Together, we can do great things.” We were not made for independence but for interdependence. Being a Christian is not a solitary pursuit.

The stones in this building are not identical

In another description of Christians but just as applicable to the composition of this building Paul wrote; “Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you’re still one body.”⁵ Nowadays mass produced bricks look the same and one is as good as another. But most buildings of old—like the temple in Jerusalem—utilized different sized stones that were hand crafted and individually selected. Although we are all

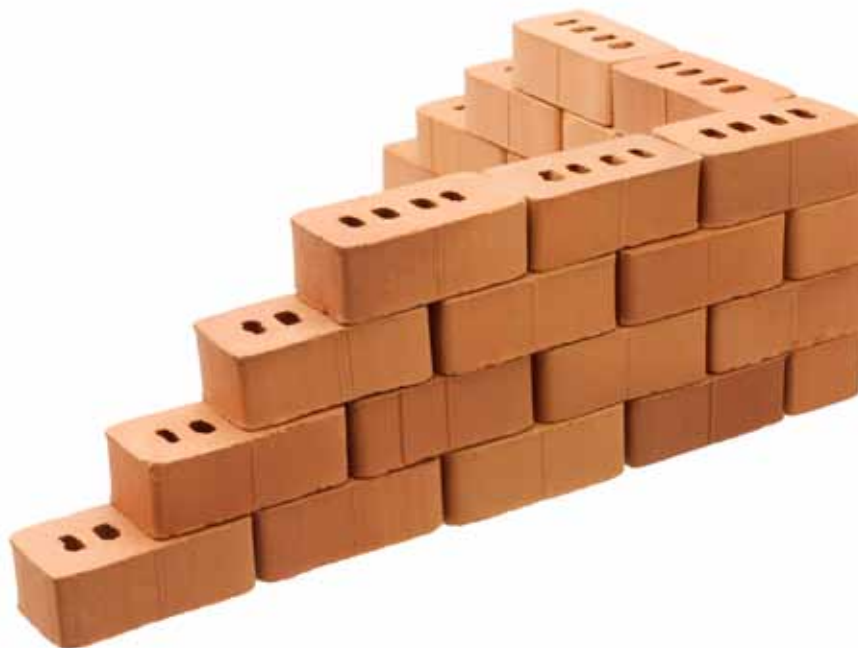
connected we are distinctly ourselves. Just as our DNA’s are unique there is nobody who can be you except you.

Every stone has its place

“God carefully places each part of the body right where he wants it.”⁶ As my father was building he would look carefully at the stones in the pile, find the one that would fit in next to and on top of other stones and place it into position. Whether it was a large square stone or small and round he always looked for

that perfect fit.

There is no unimportant stone in this building. In the same way, no matter who you are you matter to God and you have been placed exactly where you should be. Some of us are stones over the top of the door, some make up a window and some are in the back passage behind the platform that no one really sees. But we each have our place with everyone else. We are not all meant to be pastors, missionaries, worship leaders or youth leaders. But you have a ministry. It’s not your responsibility to find it—surrender your life to God, worship him, take your place in his building and let him make it happen. Remember, it is God who is doing



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Original and fresh

On a recent trip to Hungary we were given some very special, fresh spring water. It came from a spring called 'Szentkirályi' (translated: 'Holy Kingly'). Apparently the water is filtered through volcanic rock for millions of years before it surfaces. Yet, although it is very old, it is also very fresh. Its freshness is not determined by its age, but by the fact that it is unpolluted. Wars came and went, while this water quietly filtered through the rock. Despite the turmoil on the surface, the water remained undisturbed and unaffected. Once it bursts through the eye of the fountain, nothing compares to the purity and freshness of this water. Time did not make it old... its freshness was preserved within that rock, that mountain.

The life that burst into our world, when the Word became flesh, is that original, pure and unpolluted life that God had in mind for man all along. The events in this world did not pollute it... it remained preserved in the rock of its origin. Jesus displays God's undisturbed, original thought of man... original yet fresh. He comes to us, not with a container of water that will simply quench our thirst for a period, but to introduce us again to the eye of the fountain, to discover the source of living waters within ourselves... to discover our true selves preserved within the rock of our origin.

Here is a thought-to-thought translation of 1 John 2:5–8.

Whoever treasures this word, not allowing any of it to escape his attention, will know the reality of God's perfected love within himself and rest in the sure understanding that we are in Him.

by
Andre Rabe

You owe it to yourself to take this union life beyond mere confession. Let His abiding presence direct your every step; your whole being was made to reflect Him.

For you to display the same life that He displayed, was the unavoidable conclusion of this message from the very start. Perfect love was the original motivation and is the final conclusion to this message.

Brethren, what I'm describing is not a new message, but the original message, from the Author Himself. Yet it is fresh... my writing is a fresh expression of the truth revealed in Christ and confirmed in you. What has always been true in Him and in you becomes fresh as your appreciation is awakened, as the darkness of ignorance is replaced by the reality of what truth reveals.

There is no better message than the original. God never changed His mind about what He imagined in the very beginning—to unite Himself with you in uninterrupted enjoyment. Once we understand this authentic plan, we will no longer be "tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine."¹

This message is also the key to the release of creativity, to a fresh expression. Some think, that to be creative, to be fresh, we need to think up something completely new. No! You need to discover the original, unpolluted, undiluted logic of God, give it your entire attention... and while you treasure that word, it will inspire the most creative life. Once we discover the original, it inspires us to give authentic expression to it. □

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¹ Ephesians 4:14

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the building.⁷ When the Holy Spirit does something, you are ministering before you even know about it.

When God takes up residence

What an honour and privilege! God has a building project and we are part of it! Every time someone trusts Jesus Christ as Saviour, another "stone" is cemented into its place in the walls of this unique building. But just what is this building? In Ephesians 2:21–22 we discover that it is "a holy temple built by God... a temple in which God is quite at home". To understand this we need to know that in Old Testament times God's "home" was in the tabernacle in the wilderness and later in the temple in Jerusalem. When God took up residence there he manifested his 'moving in' with a display of fire and light—the 'shekinah.' In the innermost room of the tabernacle and temple was the Holy of Holies which signified the presence of God. The Greek word for that room is *naos*.

What does this have to do with you and me today?

¹ Ephesians
2:20–21

² 1 Peter 2:5

³ Ephesians 2:20

⁴ Ephesians
2:21–22

⁵ 1 Corinthians
12:12

⁶ 1 Corinthians
12:18

⁷ Ephesians 2:22

⁸ 1 Corinthians
3:16,17; 1 Peter
2:4–5

⁹ Acts 2:1–4

Naos is the word used in verse 21 for "temple"! Paul is talking to each Christian and saying; "You are being built and fitted together in this building. You are joined to the cornerstone Jesus Christ and to one another. As this is happening, you, together with other Christians are becoming the holy naos—the actual building in which God lives."⁸

The day of Pentecost 30AD is one of the great turning points in the history of the world. On that day the *shekinah* passed over the temple in Jerusalem and descended upon an ordinary house in which the believers were gathered together. The fire divided and came to rest on each person in the room.⁹ By doing this, God was showing that through the Holy Spirit, he was beginning a new Temple—a temple that doesn't consist of stones but people who believe and follow Jesus. People who don't need a church in which to worship, but people who are the church. That is what God is building—and that's who you are! □

Where is love in all of this?

I think I'm a bit of a news addict. With so many channels available covering just about everywhere on earth, I can stay informed about all the wars, threats of war, invasions, kidnappings, crimes, and political manoeuvres as they occur.

At the time of writing, the brutal murder of 148 students and staff at the Garissa University in Kenya is an unfolding 'top story', and as the days pass, more bodies are discovered. How do the parents of those students feel? How do they cope with the knowledge that their precious son or daughter has just been murdered? What if he or she is still missing? It's unthinkable! A stream of bad news like this prompts me to go into a kind of emotional self-defence mode. I take a walk around the complex where I live, or phone a friend, or browse through my family photo albums. But this only provides temporary relief. Sometimes I even feel an inexplicable sense of guilt. How can I enjoy a cup of coffee while all these terrible things are happening? But whether it's a terrorist attack in the Middle East, or crime in my own neighbourhood, there is nothing I can do.

Accustomed to violence

Clearly nothing good comes from such negative thinking, and I remind myself that Jesus told His disciples not to be troubled, and that He had overcome the world. But it also brings to mind His words in Matthew 24:12. "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold..." Most?

That's scary. Could that be me too? Can I become so bombarded with violence, bloodshed and terror that I just take it in my stride? Yet another bomb blast and any number of people killed! "Thank you God that it happened thousands of miles away, not in my street. I might as well switch to another channel and watch a chef stir up trouble in his kitchen." Perhaps this is wildly exaggerated, but like the frog immersed in cold water and heated up slowly, we can be unaware of the rising level of our indifference.

Whenever I read Jesus' message to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, I can't escape the feeling that it's easy in the 21st century to become like the Christians at Laodicea. Jesus described them as 'lukewarm', something He would spit out of His mouth. Certainly no compliment! There is so much to entertain us and divert our attention away from reality and God. When life is reasonably comfortable, it can become second nature to feel that we are ok and don't need a thing.

The evil in this world can either plunge us into fear and depression or help us grow a thick skin of self-

by
**Hillary
Jacobs**

righteousness, and even a false sense of immunity to danger and harm. So how do we as Christians guard against indifference to suffering without falling victim to misery or depression?

Blessed are the unhappy?

Jesus pronounced a blessing on 'those who mourn'. The word 'mourn' goes beyond mere sorrow, it actually means to 'experience deep grief.' He said such people would be comforted, and that is the assurance we have—the comfort of the Holy Spirit. When led by the Spirit, we are able to see beyond the mess that this world has become. We can know for certain that God's Kingdom, already present in Christ's followers, will one day fill the whole earth, and all crying and tears will be something of the past.¹

The prophet Isaiah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was able to look forward to this time of restoration. "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted...to comfort all who mourn, and to provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair..."²

Yes, I can mourn for the evil and suffering in the world, I can plead with God to ease the pain and send relief to this planet. I can, and do, get angry when I see little children

killed in the crossfire of gang warfare, toddlers raped and murdered. Our God is an emotional God, and He was very angry with those in Israel who offered their firstborn as a sacrifice to the god Molech by casting them into a fiery furnace. He hates the sin and the suffering it causes, and shares in our sorrow and mourning.

I can get weighed down by this continuous stream of bad news, but I have a powerful antidote in the Comforter. It is the Holy Spirit who enables me to set my mind on things above, to avoid being anxious about anything, and to make my requests known to God.³ Personally, I like to do some inspirational reading before going to sleep.

And the promise is that the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard my heart and mind. Though I can mourn for the evil, I can at the same time be assured it won't last forever. □

*"The promise is that the peace
of God which transcends all
understanding will guard my heart
and mind. Though I can mourn for
the evil, I can at the same time be
assured it won't last forever."*

¹ Revelation 21:4

² Isaiah 61:1–3

³ Philippians
4:6–7

Welcome to 2016

Hello and welcome to 2016!

We hope 2015 was a good year in your life, but good, bad or indifferent we hope and pray that that day by day the year ahead will bring you true peace, and fulfilment and happiness.

Many take time during the holiday period to reflect on their year gone by, and to make some personal plans for the new year. Resolutions can be flippantly made, and easily broken. But what really matters to you, to your life and the life you live with those around you?

As each year goes by we learn more and more what really matters, and what doesn't. For many of us the clamour and clutter of a myriad demands, desires and plans keep us running mentally and physically. We busily and sometimes frantically stretch ourselves striving to grasp those things we expect will satisfy the depth of our longings and inner cravings and keep life in some sort of order. What were some of those experiences or possessions that glowed bright and enticingly in your sights in the past? How have those priorities and values changed?

Often when we get to the stage of life when we figure we have less years ahead of us than behind—or a health issue, significant loss, trauma or life threatening experience for us or someone close grabs our attention—our perspective on time and how to spend it gets a makeover, sometimes a dramatic and instant one. It seems to be part of the human ageing experience. Perhaps it is a good thing that our bodies and energies slow down as we grow older. That older people cause less car accidents, consume less and take life slower in general. Ancient and modern, we seem to experience the same changing of life perspective as we age—though probably not as dramatically in the past as in our technological, consumer driven world. Priorities invariably move from the material and more momentary and self-satisfying thrills, stimulating experiences and accomplishments—to the simple lasting joys of friends, family and making a difference to the world around us. Some talk of living a more uncluttered life, others of stopping to smell the roses, others make major changes in work and lifestyle to slow down and reprioritise their time and effort.

So where are you in the journey and story of your life? What is important for you and your year ahead? What comes at the top of your list for how you use your time? What about your money? And how are you going to use your God given talents, the unique heart and mind that is you to make a difference in the times and places you make your way through in the coming days, weeks and months that make up 2016?

And underlying all of that, where is the source of strength, encouragement and inspiration going to come from to make 2016 a valuable and fulfilling year for you and those people and activities you value? Christians believe that there is a personal God who made us and wants us to learn about ourselves and what is best for

by
**Phillip
Hopwood**



us and those we care about. He wants us to build our lives on him, on his Son, Jesus Christ. To be connected like a branch to a vine and built like a house on a solid rock, to be like a tree sending its roots down into good soil and be nourished and strengthened. But an even better word picture is that of a loving parent who loves us unconditionally, and there for us no matter what, and who has already been through all we have, good and bad, and will always be there for us, even at the end of this life. □

Father he

Throughout the scriptures God is spoken of as our Father. Christ Himself, in teaching His disciples to pray, told them to pray 'our Father.'

Paul goes on to explain this further in his letter to the Romans. "The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Romans 8:15–16).

Paul talks about us being adopted children. In Roman law, the rights of natural sonship were pretty limited. In fact a Roman father could change his son's trade without even consulting him, and under some circumstances even sell or have his son put to death. However, none of this applied to someone you chose to adopt as a son. God has chosen us as His sons and daughters.

In past issues, we examined the story found in Luke 15:11–32 in terms of God's lavish love for us, and came to the conclusion that the story could also be viewed as the parable of the Prodigal God.

In this article I would like to examine some aspects of the parable that give us greater insights into the Father Heart of God, and how He expresses this lavish love towards us, His beloved children. So let's look again at this amazing parable and learn some important lessons about the Father Heart of God.

Freedom of choice

"The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them" (Luke 1:12).

Love can never be forced. It is a deep, personal relationship and as such involves freedom. God has already expressed His love towards us (John 3:16), and Christ has already died for us and forgiven our sins. Our response should be a voluntary expression of gratitude and praise towards the One who made this relationship possible.

We see that the father of the story complied without any complaint with his son's headstrong wish to receive his inheritance for immediate use (Luke 15:12)—a request that was rarely, if ever, granted in the Jewish society of Jesus' day. The apparent ease with which the younger son's desire was granted seems to suggest that the father gave his children great latitude in making choices. It seems to make no sense to our human reasoning that God would grant this, but He did.

To our human reasoning, grace makes no sense either.

But our inheritance is eternal life, which can only be accomplished through grace!

John 3:17 reveals that we are not living under condemnation, but we are saved by the grace of God.

We can demand our freedom of choice now, and God will give it to us, but the cost to us is huge, and just like

by
Tim Maguire

the son, if we choose to squander grace, we will end up in the pig pens!

God's laws are all to the benefit of His beloved children. But if we do choose to have our own way, He will not turn His back on us, but stand at the gate, always waiting and hoping for us to turn back to Him. Paul explains that grace and freedom do not amount to permission to continue in sin. "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1–2).

Generous

Luke 15:17... "even the servants have food to spare."

We see God's generosity coming out in the story too. The son knew that his father treated even his servants with exceptional generosity. No one knows the Father's heart better than Jesus. He explained to His disciples through the following analogy.

"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him?" (Matthew 7:9–11). If you ever doubt His generosity, remember that He gave His beloved Son for you.

Trustworthy

Luke 15:18: "I will set out and go back to my father..."

The son knew what kind of a father he had and must have known that he could totally trust and rely on, and turn to him for help no matter what. If he had perceived his dad to be harsh and judgemental, he probably would never have had the courage to go back.

In our Christian walk we need to start trusting God and giving Him full control over our lives. Stepping out in faith and seeing God come through for us is one of the most healing things He can do in our lives. Give God a chance to prove Himself. We can only do this if we really get to know God. Start building that relationship with little steps.

I had the pleasure of walking my young daughter to nursery school each day. There was a slight decline in the path as we approached the school, with a stone wall running alongside it. The wall started level with the path and gradually got higher. I'd hold my daughter's hand and she would walk along the top of the wall to where it ended, which was about a metre and a half off the ground, and then she would clamber down into my arms.

One day I told her to jump to me and I would catch her. She was hesitant and I could see the fear in her eyes, but she could see me right there below her, and she jumped! Of course I caught her. The following day she asked to jump again. By the end of the term it had become a challenge, and she was telling me to stand

art of God

ever further back and was taking flying leaps through the air into my waiting arms! Through putting her trust in me into practice she had allowed it to grow day by day.

Won't give up on us

Luke 15:20: "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him..."

I can picture the father in the story, staring down the

poor decisions or life choices we make, He is there for us; standing at the gate, hoping that we will have the sense to come home to Him. There is nothing we can do to change His love for us, because it's not based on what we do, it's based on who He is! Note what the apostle Paul told his protégé Timothy.

"...who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace" (2 Timothy 1:9).



path his son would have to take to return home, hoping beyond hope that today would be the day that his beloved son would come back to him.

Trust in your Father's presence. There is nothing that you can do, or have done, that can change the love He has for you. He promised He would be with us, even to the end of the age. He's not like people who hold grudges, or get too busy and don't have time for you. No matter what we do, or where we go, no matter what

Compassionate, loving and affectionate

Luke 15:20... "He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

God's love for us goes way beyond our human comprehension.

The Psalmist tells us that all the ways of the Lord are

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You are more t

I, me, myself...my life, my views, my interests, my rights, my freedom...my job, my money, my possessions. Do all these make you, you?

Your 'self'

As children grow up, they recognize they have a body. Then they become aware of their tastes, interests, views, desires, thoughts, feelings and self-consciousness. With these they feel they can live their life independently of others.

But when we break up the stuff we are made up of, we are merely atoms (and molecules). Atoms have 1% something but 99% nothing. So atoms are mostly *nothing*. Splitting atoms produces what are called *quarks*. Quarks appear and disappear and reappear in some mysterious way. So quarks are also nothing. Scientists say quarks are simply sound waves vibrating at different frequencies. They call this *string theory*.

If all this is true (and it appears so), you are simply a string of waves with no material substance.

So how much is your 'self' worth?

The Psalmist likens our life to a breath, a fleeting shadow.¹ Apostle James likewise tells us, "You are a *mist* that appears for a little while and then vanishes."² Prophet Isaiah also echoes the same thought: "Before him [God] all the nations are as *nothing*; they are regarded by him as *worthless* and *less than nothing*."³

What does Jesus say?

A rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked him what good things he needed to do to *inherit* eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments and he quickly responded that he had been doing that even from his childhood. Jesus then asked him to go and sell all his possession, give it to the poor, and follow him. That was asking too much, so he departed sadly.⁴

This rich man identified his life with his possession and the power, status and fame that it brought. All he needed was eternal life so his life would be complete and blissful.

Jesus told his followers, "For whoever wants to save their life [self] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."⁵

He was telling them (and us), "*It is only by losing our 'self' we can gain our true self, the life of our design.*"

While our 'self' is worth little, our *true self* is invaluable beyond measure. This is because *our true self is bound up in our relationship with God and fellowman, which is what gives value.*

Your true self

Yes, life is all about relationships with God and fellowman. We don't have a separate, independent existence. That is, we cannot be ourselves by ourselves.

God is a relationship God

Even the Almighty God himself exists only in a relationship. The Father and Son commune with each



by
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Sellappan**

other *in* the Spirit. They give themselves to each other in joyful adoration and self-giving love. Jesus said, "I am *in* the Father, and... the Father is *in* me."⁶ That talks about relationship. The intimate relationship that exists within the being of God is the *basis* for all relationships.

God shares his relationship with humanity

Because God created us in his image and likeness, we too are created for relationship. In Jesus, God has eternally bound himself to humanity. Jesus told his



disciples: "I am *in* my Father, and you are *in* me, and I am *in* you"⁷ ...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are *in* me and I am *in* you. May they also be *in* us ...that they may be one as we are one—I *in* them and you *in* me."⁸ Yes, Jesus included us in his own intimate relationship with the Father.

Relationship scriptures

There are many verses in the Scripture that talk about

han your 'self'

relationships. For example: God asks us to *love one another as he has loved us. He is asking us to relate to one another in the same way he relates to us.* Similarly, he asks us to *forgive one another (as he has forgiven us), encourage one another, be patient with one another, serve one another, be at peace with one another and be kind to one another.*

Apostle Paul taught believers that *though they are many, yet they are one and belong to one another.*⁹ He was telling them that they are *relationally connected to*

stopped viewing [evaluating] others from *a human point of view.* At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How *differently* we know him now!"¹¹

God also revealed the same truth to Apostle Peter. He told Peter not to call anyone *unclean.*¹² Why? This is because Jesus had dealt with all sin once and for all on the cross. All humanity is forgiven and accepted in the Lord. Not only has he forgiven them, but has also given them his own righteousness and holiness, whether they knew it or not, believed it or not.

To drive home this point, Jesus told his disciples the parable of the sheep and the goats. *He told them not to fail to recognize him in the hungry, the naked and the prisoners. He even called them his brethren.*¹³

In all these, God is telling us that there is no life except in relationship. Living in communion with God and with one another is the stuff of life.

Relationship gone awry

God created Adam and Eve (and the human race) because he *desired* to share his life with them. He loved them, adored them, and expected them to *reflect* the same love and adoration he gave them. Presumably they did that for a while and their life was joyful and satisfying. There was no inferiority complex, lack, shame or guilt.

But things went awry. An evil voice suggested to them that they could become like God (have eternal life, wisdom, etc.) if they ate from the *Do-It-Yourself* tree (Tree of knowledge of good and evil). So, instead of fixing their eyes on God, they set their gaze on this tree and ate the fruit. They sinned and things went awry.

Their minds were darkened and corrupted. They felt a sense of lack of being, inferior, and *not* like God (when God told them otherwise). *They were deceived into believing that they could become like God without God,* which was just impossible. That's why God told them that they would die if they partook of that tree, chose an independent life apart from him.¹⁴

Overcome by fear, guilt and shame, they no longer saw God as their loving Father and Friend. They now saw him as a stern judge waiting to unleash his punishment on them. And they also didn't see themselves as they really were—as his beloved children. They saw themselves as inferior creatures. Their darkened minds changed their perception of God and of themselves.

We are no different from them. Their story is also our story. That is how deadly sin (rejecting God) is.

Jesus restored our broken relationship

Thank God, he sent his son Jesus to undo the damage and give us a *new* relationship. Through his life, death, resurrection and ascension, God dealt with our sin once and for all. He redeemed our fallen image and made us holy and righteous. And he also adopted us

each other.

He *awoke* to the reality of Christ dwelling *in* him. Fully persuaded, he went and preached the same message: "...it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, to reveal His Son *in* me, that I might preach Him *in* [not among] the Gentiles."¹⁰

From then on, Paul saw people through God's lens. He saw *Christ in them.* That's why, he wrote, "We have



into his family. That is a *done* deal. He is now asking us to come and participate in his abundant life. This is the Good News Jesus came to preach and it is also Church's mission today.

Expansive and glorious life

The self-based life is very limited as it can only draw strength from itself. It cannot grow, learn, or discover much. Such a life will be dull and boring.

The relationship-based life on the other hand is dynamic and expansive. It draws its strength from God (who is the source of all blessings) as well as from the entire *redeemed* community. So the possibilities for growth, learning and discovery are endless. Such a life is colourful, dynamic and fulfilling.

In this environment, your world is no longer limited to your 'self' and your immediate family and friends. The entire community (running into millions) will be your world. It will truly be a *transformed* world as everyone will be led by the Holy Spirit, each with their own *unique* personality, gifts and talents.

As you interact with this community, *they become*

- ¹ Psalm 144:4
- ² James 4:14
- ³ Isaiah 40:15–17
- ⁴ Matthew 19:16–22
- ⁵ Matthew 16:25
- ⁶ John 14:10
- ⁷ John 14:20
- ⁸ John 17:21–23
- ⁹ Romans 12:5,
1 Corinthians 12:27
- ¹⁰ Galatians 1:15–16
- ¹¹ 2 Corinthians 5:16
- ¹² Acts 10:28
- ¹³ Matthew 25:31–45
- ¹⁴ Genesis 3:5

part of you and you become part of them. This union that we have with one another is what produces intimate relationship, the very kind the Father, Son and Holy Spirit enjoy. Eternal life (knowing God) and everlasting life (living forever) has meaning only in such a context.

God is a God of infinite possibilities. He will never be dull or boring. He will continually surprise us, reveal himself in fresh and creative ways, individually and corporately. It will be an exciting adventure, an eternal romancing with God.

God created us in his image and likeness for the express purpose of sharing his own intimate relationship with us. Thanks to Jesus. He has done everything necessary so we could participate in his own intimate relationship. Yes, you have an open access to heaven, to God's glorious life, right now. Why wait? □

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loving and faithful (Psalm 25:10).

In 2 Kings 13:23, speaking of the Israelites who continually disobeyed and rejected God, the scripture tells us that "The Lord was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

How much more so will He have compassion and forgiveness on those in covenant through His Son Jesus the Christ? The father didn't stand and lecture his son about the error of his ways, but ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

Gracious and forgiving

"For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate" (Luke 15:24).

Too many people view God as an angry Father who is looking for any sort of excuse to punish us for the wrong that we do. How far this is from the truth!

Psalm 103:8–10 reveals more to us about God's Father heart. "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbour His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities."

When we have done wrong and are suffering the consequences, or are wracked with guilt, the Father doesn't take any sort of pleasure in our suffering; He wants, as any father would, to comfort us. Don't try to intellectualise or spiritualise pain, thinking of it as a punishment from God. Rather turn to Him, crawl into his arms and allow Him, through the Holy Spirit in you, to comfort you.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him..." (Psalm 103:12–13)

Empathetic and patient

Luke 15:28: "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with Him."

Even in dealing with the self-righteousness of the second brother, we can see a very important aspect of the Father heart of God. He went out and pleaded with the older brother, 'come in, and let's rejoice together!'

Believe it or not, the scriptures reveal that God doesn't want to lose a single one of us. He understands our humanness and weaknesses. Christ took on our humanity so that He could act as intercessor and mediator for us.

Paul writes, "...who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2: 4–5).

As Christians, we need to draw closer to the Father, allowing His Father Heart to touch and change our stony human hearts. We too must rejoice and be glad when we see sinners turning to Him. More than anything, God wants our hearts to mourn for the things that pain His heart, and that we hold others in the same love that He does.

Ephesians 4:6 reveals that God has included all people in His plan "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all..." God is an inclusive Father in Paul's mind. He is not just the Father of Israel, but through Jesus each of us is adopted by God, and God is everyone's Father in Christ. This means that the people we meet on the street, those in far off lands, those who may disagree with us, even those who don't believe as we do—they are all included in Paul's statement above: "One God and Father of all".

And all are included in the liberating, generous, trustworthy, steadfast, compassionate, loving, affectionate, graciously forgiving and patient Father Heart of God! □

Reference: <http://alwaysloved.net>

Little is much!

Our Heavenly Father is aware of *everything*—the entire universe including all the far-away star-filled galaxies that extend beyond our imagination. But He is also aware of *little* things, including you and me. We may feel insignificant, just a speck in the vastness of space, but God knows our actions, words, thoughts, emotions, needs and desires, and even the hairs on our heads.

Jesus, who was God in human flesh, took note of things we may consider insignificant. He took special note of the generosity of a poor widow who donated two small coins into the temple treasury.¹ On another occasion He used a boy's meager lunch—some chunks of bread and a few little fish, to feed a crowd of thousands.²

Concerning the Old Testament, Jesus remarked, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until *everything* is accomplished."³ He was focused on fulfilling *every* Old Testament requirement and prophecy concerning Himself, and there were many!

How about you and me? We may think we are too little, unimportant, uneducated, and ineffective to merit God's notice. But that is not the case.

Our "little" actions

"I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward."⁴ Giving someone something to drink is a common everyday "little" act, especially for mothers. But our Heavenly Father sees and remembers!

Scripture encourages us to incorporate many seemingly unimportant habits into our daily living. For example, the Apostle John tells us to greet one another by name.⁵ We are also instructed to obey *every* ordinance of man, whether they be from a king, governor, or those who enforce law (unless in the rare case when they contradict God's law).⁶ That covers all traffic ordinances and other rules we may tend to disregard.

These are matters we may consider "little", but let's notice an important principle that Jesus taught, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much."⁷ Notice, if we are trustworthy in doing *little* things, God may give us greater opportunities to serve Him. And, as Jesus said, this principle can also work the other way. A "little" failure to be trustworthy may hold us back.

We benefit when we study Scripture and incorporate God's teachings into our words and actions!

Our "little" words

How important little words can be! We can encourage hurting people. "Pleasant words are a honeycomb,



by
Paul Hailey

sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."⁸ On the other hand, we can discourage others by poorly chosen words. "Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out."⁹

Unfortunately, we live in an age of cynicism—a disposition to doubt the sincerity or goodness of human motives and actions without any valid reason. Government leaders are a popular conversational topic, with people often making sweeping statements implying that *all* of them are dishonest or greedy. That is not accurate, and it puts many good people in a bad light.

Let's be careful what we say! Scripture tells us that God has ordained human government and it is a force against evil.¹⁰ Thank God for human government in spite of all its flaws!

Some folks wrongly insinuate that all wealthy people are dishonest. That's not true either.

Our words should be true *and* helpful. Let's get the facts before making judgmental statements, then give everyone the benefit of doubt. The Apostle Paul told Titus to "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward *all* men."¹¹

Our "little" careless words can damage the reputations of decent, honest people. "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."¹² Let us be wise healers!

Our "little" prayers

We may think our "little" prayers don't matter much. We may wonder if God listens as we mumble a few inarticulate words. But, let's notice where those words go! They ascend to God's throne where they are symbolically placed in golden bowls under the care of holy, spirit beings.¹³ Our Heavenly Father treasures our prayers, as "little" as they may seem to us.

Participate in His work

God is aware of everything and in control of everything. But He is also concerned about *little* things—every bird in the sky, and every hair on our heads.

Let's remember, God calls us to participate in His work of saving the world—the biggest project ever conceived. His work started small, with Jesus preaching to a few insignificant men. But His work grew, eventually to fill the whole world. Our "little" actions and words can make a difference, when God is in them.

Let's ask God to reign in everything we say and do. □

¹ Luke 21:1–4

² John 6:9–14

³ Matthew 5:18

⁴ Mark 9:41

⁵ 3 John 14

⁶ 1 Peter 2:13–15

⁷ Luke 16:10

⁸ Proverbs 16:24

⁹ Proverbs 17:14

¹⁰ Romans 13:1–3

¹¹ Titus 3:1,2

¹² Proverbs 12:18

¹³ Revelation
5:6–8

I doubt it

by
**Joyce
Catherwood**

It has taken me years to accept that there is room for doubt in my life and it can turn out to be a good thing.

At one time I felt I had all the answers, tied up in a neat little package. Not just answers to the big questions of life and death, but solid answers to all the in between questions as well. This gave me a feeling of security and control over my existence, but it left no space for dealing satisfactorily with doubt, mystery, time and chance, miscalculations or the unexpected sharp curves life tends to throw at us.

I didn't see the need to question the answers provided dogmatically and authoritatively by others in whom I had put all my trust. This is not uncommon as many people automatically accept the belief system of their childhood. And then one day I began to ask questions, and discovered my cherished answers were seriously lacking. The bottom of my neat, organized, knowledge package came apart in the asking and everything fell out. I was left to pick up the pieces, some broken beyond repair, and realized they would never fit together perfectly again. It was like starting all over and I felt very vulnerable, yet the process was so necessary.

Here's the thing. We can't presume to spell out what God himself has not spelled out. To quote author Philip Yancey, speaking of his own personal experience, which closely resembled mine: "The church environment I grew up in had no room for doubt.... Anyone who strayed from the defined truth risked punishment as a deviant." It shouldn't come as a surprise—no matter how many rules we follow or who we are, life with all its highs, joys and triumphs, and its lows with loss and pain, happens to all of us.

An element of uncertainty

Yancey's book *Reaching for the Invisible God* has a basic premise: God's invisibility guarantees we will experience times of doubt. A relationship between an invisible God and visible humans will always involve an element of uncertainty. To pretend doubting never happens or is an indication something is wrong with us isn't necessary. Unavoidable, seemingly unanswerable questions will arise from time to time, especially in seasons of sore trial. Some answers will be opaque. So do be prepared for mystery.

A finite mind will never be capable of completely

grasping the infinite. We often see through a glass darkly. Life is not destined to always be easy or predictable. Quoting Yancey again, "The only thing more difficult than having a relationship with an invisible God is having no such relationship." And strangely enough, the closer our relationship, the more questions we may have about his involvement in our lives.

Though some things may remain clouded, that which is absolutely crucial for us to be able to establish a deep and lasting relationship with God, can be clearly seen and under-stood.

[To have Faith in Christ] means, of course, trying to do all that he says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to him, it must follow that you are trying to obey him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these

things in order to be saved, but because he has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you. [C.S. Lewis]

During times of uncertainty, we have only to open our eyes wider to see the invisible God in the marvels and intricacies of his creation, nature and the cosmos. Goodness, which comes only from God, is all around us if we would only look for it. Miraculous interventions of all shapes and sizes surround us. And

knowing in advance how perplexing his invisibility would be for us, the Son of God came to earth in visible flesh to live with us - to show us who God is and what he is like. Maybe it's just me, but it has been stimulating and liberating to ask questions, ponder and meditate on life's penetrating issues such as death, eternity, suffering, the existence of God. I am no longer reluctant to doubt and question and I am not afraid of the obscure. Even though I don't have all the answers as I once thought, I do have a more profound certainty than ever before.

You would think it would be the opposite. Having all the answers is not a requirement nor is it meant to be. I have found seeking to personally connect and bond with the Creator of life and the universe is what counts.

Of that, I have no doubt. ■



Thank God it doesn't depend on us!

This past December, my son turned 34. How did that happen? Where did the years go? He is now a “grownup,” as he puts it. He seems to be as surprised by this as I am. And last September, he got married. Yeah! Finally!

My son had not dated much and when he casually dropped the bombshell two years ago that he was “headed to his girlfriend’s house for dinner,” I was shocked. “Girlfriend! I didn’t know you had a girlfriend!” Well, he did have a girlfriend and she cooks! We are delighted with this young woman who is now his wife. She adores my son and tells me often what a wonderful partner he is and how lucky she feels to have found him. He is equally effusive about his delight in her.

I have agonized for years over the negative effects my failed marriage and the breakup of our family would have on my children. My heart has broken over and over again as I relived the devastation my son exhibited when he realized his father and I were getting a divorce. I remember telling him, “I’m sorry, son. I can’t fix this.”

Eight years after my divorce, God redeemed my failed marriage by providing me with an amazing partner, a man whom I have been happily married to for more than 20 years. He is a joy to me, and my children have come to love and enjoy him as well. We have a life filled with love, laughter, God and goodness, a real partnership with each other and with God. We’ve had some dark days. Life is not without its challenges. But God has faithfully seen us through them all.

Even so, I was often wracked by guilt and regret about the pain I had inflicted on my children and all the ways I had failed them. How could I ever make it up to them? How could God possibly make things right with them? Would they ever be able to have successful relationships and happy marriages? So I beat myself up, cried a lot and pleaded with God for forgiveness and help.

Why do we torture ourselves? Why do we doubt God when he has proven over and over again his goodness and love? I couldn’t fix things for my son so I thought he was doomed. What crooked thinking Satan can use to ensnare us and rob us of joy!

This scripture has been a lifeline over the years to rescue me from my negative thinking:

Philippians 4:6–8: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Now my son is happily married. He and his wife are partnering together and planning for their future. Again God has proven he is the Great Redeemer. I couldn’t fix things for my son, but that certainly didn’t mean God wasn’t on the job.

I can’t begin to tell you how reassuring and comforting this turn of events in my son’s life has been

by
Karon Smith



for me. I feel my heavenly father has pulled me into his lap, hugged me close and whispered in my ear, “See, I had this one in hand the whole time. There was no need for your anxiety. Why do you doubt? Relax! You can trust me.”

All that angst, anxiety, guilt and despair about our mistakes and failures is not required by God; it is suffering we choose to bring on ourselves. God is our all-powerful Father who can use any circumstance for good if we let go and let him. We can’t fix things but God can. Thank God it doesn’t depend on us! □

The extraordinary in the ordinary

What is your pet peeve? One of my biggest annoyances is being stuck in traffic. A few years ago I was stuck in a traffic jam for so long that I felt I had been there for the whole day! However, the good news is that I have stopped complaining in traffic jams. One reason is that I heard of a traffic jam in China that went on not for an hour, or a day or a week, but for 12 days! Ironically, the cause of the huge traffic jam was the road-work along a 120 kilometre stretch of the busy highway—essentially turning it into a big parking lot. So whenever I begin to agonise in the heavy traffic I recall this bizarre incident. It helps me to calm down—a little!

But I have a far greater reason for no longer complaining about traffic jams. It all has to do with a verse I discovered in the Book of Proverbs. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me give you a little background to my life-changing discovery.

About a year ago it dawned on me that Proverbs doesn't discuss many of the most important Biblical subjects. There is nothing about heaven, hell, church attendance, bible study, salvation, fasting or prophecy. Instead, the wise sayings are about the ordinary day-to-day-ness of life: relationships, financial accountability, laziness, friendships, emotions, communication, criticism, responsibility and so forth.

Of course God cares about our understanding of the enormous Biblical truths, but what became amazingly clear to me was that He cares deeply about the nuances that make a difference in our relationships and ordinary daily experiences. But that's not all. The New Testament tells us that the personified 'divine wisdom' of the Old Testament is actually Jesus.¹ The proverbs are expressions of the wisdom of Christ. But it gets more intriguing. One of Jesus' titles is "Immanuel" which means "God with us". If He is with us and in us² then He is involved in every detail of our ordinary day-to-day lives. Proverbs 1:20–21 emphasises this:

"Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks."

In these verses wisdom (personified as a woman), is constantly calling out to us in our real world where we live and struggle day by day. She is readily available and in the middle of all the bustle and anxiety and competition she begs us to listen. Too many people picture God as remote, indifferent, stern, peering down at us and only interested in the big doctrines like salvation, heaven, hell and judgement. But if that is true

by
Gordon Green

then He skips over our entire lives!

In the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught us to ask Him for our 'daily bread' indicating that God is concerned about our ordinary needs—our food, our job, our clothes. This is beautifully illustrated in Jesus' first miracle when he changed water into wine.³ Although He was on the greatest mission in the history of mankind He made time to attend a wedding. Weddings in Jesus' day were week-long festivals and often the whole town was invited. To run out of wine was more than embarrassing; it broke the strong unwritten laws of hospitality. Jesus quietly responded to a heartfelt need by performing an unnecessary act of kindness at an ordinary wedding for an ordinary unnamed couple.

Jesus' concern, compassion and involvement were again revealed when He fed five thousand hungry people on a hilltop.⁴ Instead of sending the crowd home He miraculously multiplied five loaves and two fish so that "all had enough to eat." Both of these fascinating stories open a window and shine a light

into who God really is. He is so passionate and interested and involved in the details of our little lives that He is willing to reveal His love through the ordinary—loaves, fish and weddings. Not only does God love us—He really likes us!

But what about traffic jams? Is He with us in them as well? Notice how Proverbs 1:21 is rendered in the Message Bible:

"In the middle of the traffic she takes her stand. At the busiest corner she (wisdom) calls out."

The next time you are stuck in traffic see the traffic jam as the

arena of His life for that moment. Instead of blowing your hooter and punching your steering wheel, ask God to give you eyes to see Him in the moment. Perhaps He will speak a word into your heart in the stillness and peace of a traffic jam! Jesus is always with us and is doing His works in and through us. He is in our laughter. He is in our tears. He is sitting with you. He is in you as you work on your budget, wait in the bank queue and sit at your office desk. Be alert. Be aware. Listen. He may be calling out to you. There is more going on in your ordinary life right now than you ever dared to dream!

Prayer: "Holy Spirit give me eyes to see the presence and work of Jesus Christ. Show me Jesus in others, in work and play and music, in relationships, laughter and in my ordinary life. How can I glorify you as I do 'ordinary' things?" □

*"Jesus is always with us
and is doing His works in
and through us. He is in our
laughter. He is in our tears.
He is sitting with you...."*

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:30

² John 14:20

³ John 2:1–11

⁴ John 6:1–15

Finding peace in times of turmoil

On the evening of 13 November 2015 Paris was rocked by terrorist attacks that left 130 people dead. A series of coordinated attacks that involved suicide bombings and mass shootings at cafes, restaurants and a music venue sent the people of France into a state of shock and paralyzing fear. It was considered the deadliest attack on France since World War II. A state of emergency was declared as the authorities began a hunt for the perpetrators of the heinous crime. Thousands of mourners across Paris turned out to grieve for the innocent people who were killed. In one such vigil in the Place de la Republique square, hundreds of mourners suddenly began fleeing in a state of panic as someone had shouted that they heard gunfire. People fled the scene in utter fear as they thought another attack had occurred. Many ran into nearby shops and hid themselves until they were sure that there was no danger. Fear can cause such torment that it can disrupt everything in our lives.

The fright complex is rooted in every one of us. Alfred Hitchcock the famed film director and producer once said, "There is no terror in the bang, only in the anticipation of it". Today almost every nation is living in the anticipation of the 'bang'. Terrorism has grown to such an extent that extraordinary precautions need to be made for people to live safely. However, no matter how many precautions are put in place, removing the fear of terror is not that easy. How can anyone live in a peaceful state of mind in such fearful times?

Turmoil and violence are nothing new in the world. Numerous wars have occurred since ancient times and new ones are always beginning. Millions have died in conflicts all over the world. Even in peaceful times crime can be a reason for perpetual fear in our lives. Where do we turn to find the elusive peace? Is there no hope for mankind? Can anyone live with total peace in their lives? The answer is not in our defense capabilities. Rather, finding peace is a spiritual matter. True peace exists even in the midst of threats of violence and turmoil. It is a state of mind.

Isaiah Chapter 26 and verse 3 of the Bible, gives a very comforting message.¹ It says, "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you: because he trusts in you". It simply means that the person whose mind is set on God will be given perfect peace by God himself. Society today has ignored God in almost every situation of life. We go about our business hoping to



by
**Devaraj
Ramoo**

solve our problems using only our wits and come to God only in desperation. Shouldn't we be stayed on God first?

The violence and turmoil in the world are the results of man's own choice and way of life. God knows the end results of our own way of life. That is why he sent his Son, Jesus Christ to save mankind from our destructive ways. Jesus took upon himself the penalty for our sins and shed his blood on the cross to redeem mankind. The violence we experience in the world is only temporary as God has promised to send Jesus again as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to establish the Kingdom of God that will finally bring peace to the Earth.

In the meantime Jesus offers himself as a sanctuary for those who are willing to follow him. When we



trust him and let his Holy Spirit to guide us, we will experience a peace that cannot be explained in words. In John 14:27 of the Gospel of John,² Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you: not as the world gives, give I to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." There are so many of us who are troubled and afraid of bad or terrible things happening to us. In fact it is not only violence that causes us to fear. It can be finances, relationships, illness, disasters and even our imagination. We do not need to live in fear. The world cannot give us peace. Only God can. And he has made the first step for our peace by giving us Jesus Christ. Do you still need to be afraid? ☐

¹ Isaiah 26:3

² John 14:27

The Lord's supper reminds us of God's love

In spring, our thoughts are directed toward the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. These spring celebrations are of “first importance” to us, for they remind us of the meaning of Jesus’ death and the importance of his resurrection.

Because of God’s great love for us, he sent his Son to die for us, to pay a ransom to redeem us from sin. This is a central truth of our lives as Christians. I hope that we never grow tired of celebrating and observing these monumental events. They should never become stale or routine.

As often as we observe the Lord’s Supper, we should let it remind us afresh of God’s love for us, a love that will never fail, a love that will never get smaller. Though humans may be unfaithful, God will never leave us or forsake us. Though we may struggle and stumble many times, God never abandons us. He is always ready to welcome us back.

As we commemorate Jesus’ death, we are gloriously confident of God’s love for us. We do not need to worry that our sins, no matter how many or how serious, have cut us off from him. God always welcomes his children.

Of course, we are also mindful that Jesus died because of sin. He went to the cross because humans chose to decide for themselves what is right and wrong. We have all done that, and we have all repented of that—many times. We seek to do God’s will, not our own. We do not want to participate in self-willed life, for that is the approach to life that cut us off from God, sentenced us to death, and caused our Savior’s death. So the Lord’s Supper is a reminder to us to humble ourselves (even as Jesus did, even unto death on a cross) and seek to serve others.¹

I’m sure you know that each of us is woefully inadequate to the task set before us! It is so hard for



by
**Dr. Joseph
Tkach**

us to put aside our own interests and serve others! It is impossible for us to escape this body of death!

The good news is that God has provided the way, and it comes not through the death of Jesus Christ, which reconciled us to God, but through his life.² For a balanced understanding of the Christian life, we must remember that our Savior is a living Savior, resurrected from the dead, ascended into glory, seated in a position



¹ Philippians
2:4–8

² Romans 5:10

of honor and power with God the Father. He intercedes for us, and he lives in us, and we in him. Because of his life, we walk in newness of life, living in a state of forgiveness instead of condemnation. ■

The right premise

An old saying tells us if we don't know where we're going, we won't get there. It's also true if we don't look where we're going, we'll go where we look. I guess that's why many of us see January as a good time to either make new goals or renew our commitment to accomplish goals we let slip from previous years. Goals help us know where we want to go and help us stay focused in the right direction.

We all need to set goals and stick to habits and routines that help us live good, productive lives. Otherwise we can let life distract us. This is one of the reasons people get to the end of their lives and wonder why they didn't accomplish as much as they wanted to when they were young and idealistic.

Goals are only as good as the premise from which we operate. If someone lives from the premise that wealth is the only important objective, the steps taken to reach that goal may land him or her in jail, or stuck in a lonely, frustrating life. The right premise produces good goals and the success that leads to contentment and joy.

So what is the best premise from which to live? Opinions about this are many and varied, depending on the age, gender, culture or religion of the one you're asking. Even Christians, who all read the same Bible, offer differing viewpoints. Some operate from the premise that the body is evil so everything they do is geared toward punishing and keeping the body in submission. Others believe in predestination, which colors how they live, either as one of the chosen, one of the damned or one who doesn't know and can't do anything about it, so let's eat, drink and be merry. Some are preoccupied with bringing others to Christ and some live as monks, with any and everything in between.

The Bible does give an answer and it's found in 1 John 4:8: God is love. This is the starting place for learning who God is. If we don't start there, reading the Bible can be confusing and lead us down wrong paths about his nature and his intentions toward humanity. Without this basic premise about God, life doesn't make sense. Difficult circumstances and crushing trials can turn us against him and others. If we don't believe he loves us, what's the point? Life can seem futile.

God is love is also the best starting point for daily life. Waking up each morning knowing we are loved and that he is always for us changes our whole outlook on what's ahead in the day. We see everyone else as loved by God too, which changes how we treat them. With God's love as the basic premise of life, any goal we set will be for our own good and the good of others.

Make *God is love* your starting point for the new year—for each new day—and watch what happens to your goals, your relationships and your life. It's the right and best premise and the only way to live. □

by
Tammy Tkach



Can you believe it?

Jesus died on a cross. So have many other people. But only one came back to life—Jesus. The early church announced the resurrection of Jesus, and it has been a key teaching of Christianity ever since.

But some people find it hard to believe. There must be some sort of mistake—either a mistake in the diagnosis of death or a mistake in thinking that the person is alive again.

Jesus knows that it's hard to believe—an incident with Thomas illustrates this and has a lesson for us as well.

In John 20, we are told that some disciples found that Jesus was no longer in his tomb. He soon appeared to Mary, and she told the other disciples about it. But one woman's word was not enough to convince them.

by
Dr. Michael Morrison

Jesus described the results of their mission: "If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Does this mean that God may want to forgive someone but will be thwarted by disciples who are not quite so gracious? No, Jesus is not giving the disciples the power to control what God can or cannot do.

Rather, he is speaking about what people *experience*. The context is the mission of the disciples: preaching the gospel. When the disciples preach forgiveness, people will experience forgiveness. When the disciples don't preach it, people will not have the joy of knowing they are forgiven. Jesus wants the disciples to announce forgiveness to all the people God forgives (and that, as we find out elsewhere in the Bible, includes everyone).

The disciples see Jesus (verses 19–20)

"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'" We do not know exactly how Jesus got into the room on that Sunday evening, but John implies that it was in some supernatural way. Jesus could still do miracles.

He greeted them with peace, and "after he said this, he showed them his hands and side." Apparently there were still holes in his hands and a spear wound in the side—although the wounds caused by scourging were presumably gone.

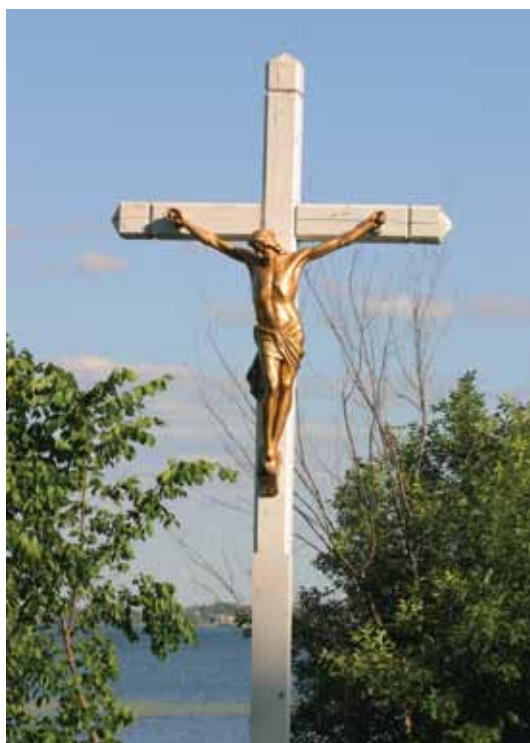
"The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord." They believed.

Authorized to preach (verses 21–23)

Jesus repeated his greeting and then added, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." This is John's version of the Great Commission. Just as Jesus was sent to earth with a mission, so now this mission is given to the disciples.

Jesus had promised that he would not abandon the disciples—he would come to them in the form of "another advocate...the Spirit of truth."¹ Jesus fulfilled that promise: "And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

Some scholars think that Jesus was reissuing the promise and that it was not fulfilled until 50 days later, on the day of Pentecost.² Others say the disciples received the Spirit at this time, and the Spirit came again in a visible way on the day of Pentecost. We do not need to resolve that question now, but we see here that Jesus was not a ghost, vision, or apparition—he was a living, breathing human being with a real body.



Thomas believes (verses 24–29)

However, one disciple was absent from the Sunday evening gathering. "Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!'"

But he was skeptical. He said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." He wanted not just to see, but also to touch.

Jesus gave him what he wanted: "A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'"

"Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'" Jesus not only appeared—he knew what Thomas had said a week earlier.

We do not know whether Thomas touched Jesus, but he responded with faith. "Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'" Earlier, Thomas had called Jesus Lord;³ now he calls him God. As John tells us in the opening verse, "The Word was God."⁴ John wants Thomas's response to be ours as well, that we accept Jesus as our Lord and our God.

Jesus himself moves the discussion to future believers, including us: "Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" □

Dr. Michael Morrison teaches classes in the New Testament at Grace Communion Seminary.

¹ John 14:16–18

² Acts 2

³ John 14:5

⁴ John 1:1

I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked if I might help Him. I ended up by asking God to do His work though me.

Hudson Taylor

Never lose an opportunity for seeing anything that is beautiful. For beauty is God's handwriting—a

wayside sacrament.

Welcome it in every fair face, in every fair sky, in every fair flower, and thank God for it as a cup of His blessing.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Employ whatever God has entrusted you with, in doing good, all possible good, in every possible kind and degree...

John Wesley

Faith is a living and unshakable confidence, a belief in God so assured that a man would die a thousand deaths for its sake.

Martin Luther

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.

Martin Luther King Jr.

The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

Zephaniah 3:17

Faith does not eliminate questions. But faith knows where to take them.

Elisabeth Elliot

We never grow closer to God when we just live life. It takes deliberate pursuit and attentiveness.

Francis Chan

We may speak about a place where there are no tears, no death, no fear, no night; but those are just the benefits of heaven. The beauty of heaven is seeing God.

Max Lucado

A woman's heart should be so hidden in God that a man has to seek Him just to find her.

Max Lucado

Always, everywhere God is present, and always He seeks to discover Himself in each one.

A. W. Tozer

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

Martin Luther King Jr.

The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of deep discouragement. I have to go to God in prayer with tears in my eyes, and say, 'O God, forgive me,' or 'Help me.'

Billy Graham

Quotes by Watchman Nee

Unless self love is abandoned the believer shall forever shrink back when called actually to take up the cross for Christ.

By accepting His death as our death we enter into this union with the Lord.

The Christian experience, from start to finish, is a journey of faith.

The note of hallelujah must never be in short supply in the spirit of the believer.

Outside of Christ, I am only a sinner, but in Christ, I am saved. Outside of Christ, I am empty; in Christ, I am full. Outside of Christ, I am weak; in Christ, I am strong. Outside of Christ, I cannot; in Christ, I am more than able. Outside of Christ, I have been defeated; in Christ, I am already victorious. How meaningful are the words, "in Christ."

Fellowship means among other things that we are ready to receive of Christ from others. Other believers minister Christ to me, and I am ready to receive.



What ground is left for accusation since sin's penalty has been fully paid? The blood of the Lord has atoned for all the sins of a believer; hence there is no more condemnation in the conscience.

May the things of this world so lose their power over us that we do not in the slightest wish to be "worldly"; nay, we even delight in not remaining "in the world".

Never adopt an attitude of indifference, for if you do you will suffer for it. The weight will grow heavier and heavier.

The greatest negative in the universe is the Cross, for with it God wiped out everything that was not of Himself: the greatest positive in the universe is the resurrection, for through it God brought into being all.

With regard to the question of sin, man is not required to do anything. He need only consider this an accomplished fact and he will reap the effectiveness of the death of Jesus in being wholly delivered from the power of sin.

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Printed in Malaysia by Hin Press & Trading Sdn. Bhd. (71078-D), No. PT 45855, Batu 2, Jalan Kapar, 41400 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia.