

THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Jul-Aug 2009

Creation and evolution

p.5

Racial slurs—do we need them?

p.15

The single-parenting challenge

p.16

THE PLAIN TRUTH

ISSN 1675-3100



9 771675 310008

PP 12578/03/2010 (023390)

In search of the God of the Gasps

Three thousand years ago, King David looked up into the heavens and was moved to write with jaw-dropping awe:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands."¹

He actually couldn't see much of it. Without a telescope, you can only see a few thousand stars, the moon, an occasional comet or meteorite and five of the planets. So how much more, then, can we who have looked out to the very edge of the universe, and discovered trillions of stars in billions of galaxies, supernovae, quasars and black holes, proclaim the work of God's hands?

"By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of His divine being,"² wrote Paul, long before anyone had explored that Creation through the lenses of powerful telescopes on the ground and in space, electron microscopes and particle colliders. Using those instruments to enhance our senses, we have discovered hitherto undreamed-of levels of beauty and intricacy in the shimmering web of energy that underlies what we experience as physical matter and life.

It must be exciting to be a scientist today. It must be even more exciting to be a scientist who believes in God, able to examine the natural world through eyes that recognise the work of the great Master Architect. How sad then, that so many believers see science as a threat and scientists as enemies of faith.

God in the Gaps

Nowhere is this more acute than in the ongoing battle between evolution and the first chapter of Genesis. Traditionally, opponents of evolution have pointed to the "gaps" in the theory, and highlighted these gaps as clear evidence of the need for a Creator. They do not seem to be aware that research has closed many of those gaps, and others are under investigation. Like it or not, the evidence is mounting that evolution through natural selection is the way life develops. There have been many refinements and modifications since *The Origin of Species* was published in 1858, but it does

by
John Halford

now look as if Charles Darwin did not get it all wrong.

There need be no conflict between good science and faith in God. The world needs both, and never more so than now, as the next generation must face up to some unprecedented challenges. We desperately need fresh thinking and new ideas. We need to encourage Christian young men and women to join in the quest for scientific breakthroughs and new technologies. We need people motivated to use what they discover to serve their fellow human beings with humility, and treat their environment with respect.

Some scientists recognise this. In a remarkably

frank book, *The Trouble with Physics*, physicist Lee Smolin explains what he believes is wrong with his field of expertise—theoretical physics. After guiding us through some of the revolutionary ideas that are being examined at the cutting edge of research, Smolin admits that progress has bogged down. The reason, he believes, is that many of his colleagues are blocking progress by clinging to obsolete ideas.

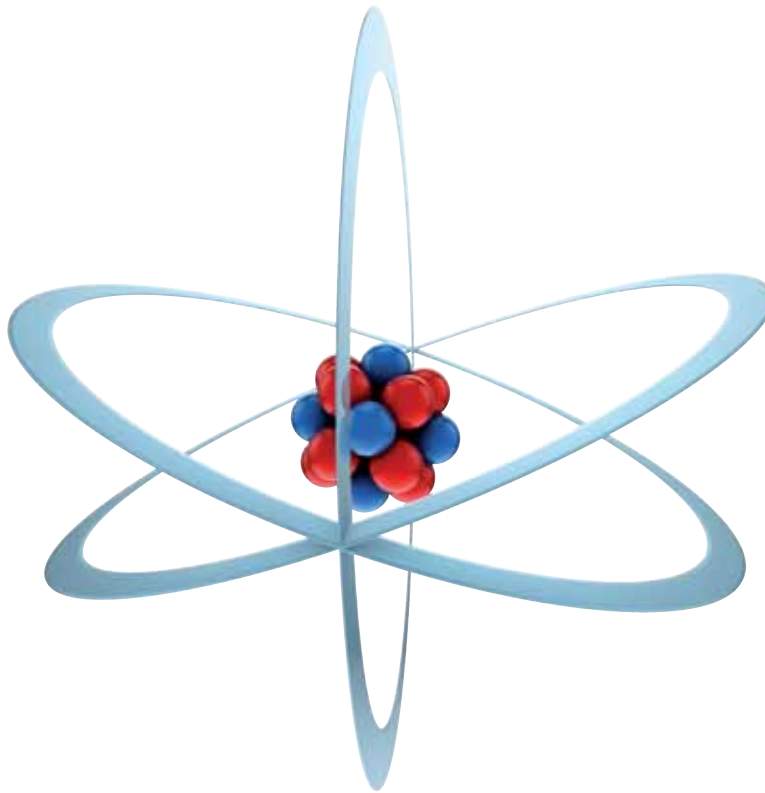
He says: "I believe there is something basic we are all missing, some wrong assumption we are all making. If this is so, we need to isolate the wrong assumption and replace it with a new idea."³

Smolin's plea to his fellow physicists is that they not throttle the next generation of researchers. "The worst thing we could do would

be to hold them back by insisting they work with our ideas."⁴

Can we, as Christians, commissioned to bring the good news of the gospel to the world, speak with the same openness and candour?

As with theoretical physics, we cannot afford to hold back our best young people by trapping them in hidebound concepts and anti-scientific worldviews. What the world needs now is not more people to desperately defend the increasingly beleaguered "God of the Gaps". We need our best minds to join in the quest for innovation and discovery, and then stand back occasionally from what they are discovering in awe of the God of all Creation and gasp, "How great Thou art". □



¹ Psalm 19:1

² Romans 1:20, *New Living Translation*.

³ Lee Smolin, *The Trouble with Physics*, p. 256

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 258

THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding



16



19



11



18



22

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Issue No. 2 | Volume No. 8 |
| July–August 2009 | PP 12578/03/2010 (023390) |
| Editor | Dr. P. Sellappan |
| Managing Editor | Low Mong Chai |
| Co-ordinator | Susan Low |
| Editorial & Advisory Committee | Ben David |
| | Devaraj Ramoo |
| | Stefanie Tai |
| | Tan Ten Lee |
| | Wong Mein Kong |
| | Wong Teck Kong |
| Editorial Adviser | John Halford |
| Design | Richard Low |
| Design Adviser | John D. Stettaford |

Malaysia

Office Address:
No.98, Jalan Zapin 3A/KU5,
Mutiarra Point (off Jalan Meru),
Bandar Bukit Raja, Batu Belah,
41050 Klang

Website: www.wcg-klang.net
Email: ptasia@myjaring.net

Postal Address:
P. O. Box 2043,
Pusat Bisnes Bukit Raja,
Pos Malaysia Bhd.,
40800 Shah Alam.

Singapore

Jurong Point Post Office, P.O. Box 054, Singapore 916402

The Plain Truth is published five times a year as funds allow, and is sponsored by the Worldwide Church of God Malaysia, 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 increasingly secular society. 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 Worldwide Church of God, 2009.

cover story

5 **Creation and evolution**

Creation account and scientific knowledge need not contradict.

articles

9 **Love's hot pursuit**

God has always loved us.

10 **Why did Jesus get baptised?**

Jesus entered into our baptism to make us righteous.

11 **Imagining God**

God is infinitely greater than our minds can grasp.

12 **The Great Exchange**

Exchanging our imperfect life for Jesus' perfect life.

16 **The single-parenting challenge**

Some tips for single parents.

17 **Lozi proverb**

The whole is greater than its parts.

18 **Reflections**

Our past experience can help us better chart our future.

22 **Living a life of faith**

Faith is not a complicated concept.

regular features

2 **Editorial**

4 **What our readers say**

15 **Another angle**

19 **Speaking of life...**

20 **Bystander**

21 **Hmm...**

Something to think about.

What our readers say:

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH helpful as its contents give me a lot of motivation and meaning in life. It also strengthens my faith in God. Lately I have not been reading your magazine because I have other spiritual books to read and I do not wish to receive the magazine anymore so that others who really need it can get my copy. Thank you for the subscription and I am enclosing herewith a token of my appreciation for the issues I have received.

Chong Siew Lien
Masai

Ed: Thank you for your gift in supporting this ministry. Your selfless gesture is admirable and we honour your request in terminating your subscription. However, if at any time you wish to continue receiving THE PLAIN TRUTH magazine, we are most happy to put you back on our mailing list.

The cover story by Paul Kroll "Sinners in the arms of a loving God" (Feb-Mar 2009) is an excellent one. It tells plainly how God views sinners and what He has done through His Son Jesus Christ to redeem them from sin and eternal death. It is so refreshing when compared to the "fire and brimstone" sermons that some preachers preach. Everyone should read and re-read this article so that he/she really understands God's love for us. All the other articles are also very well written and spiritually refreshing. Keep up the good work and may God bless you all richly.

Reader
Petaling Jaya

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH helpful because sometimes I am at a loss when I encounter problems and need an answer to deal with them with patience and kindness. Your magazine helps me not to yield to selfishness or arrogance. I can't say I have totally succeeded but I try. Your magazine inspires me in more ways than one. Thank you.

Daljit Kaur
Kuala Lumpur

Ed: God's Word is likened to a lamp lighting our walk, our journey in life. It's our aim to bring spiritual understanding and encouragement to our readers and help them in their difficult journey. Being human, it is a constant struggle with our carnal nature but God has promised to help those who desire to obey Him and accept Jesus

Christ as their Saviour. His Holy Spirit will be their helper, strength and guide.

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me a lot in my cell group ministry and also in my preparation for sermon in my church. Thank you so much for your magazine because it really motivates my group to listen attentively to my sermons. Please keep sending it to me. I am sorry I can't make any contribution. I can't afford it but I'm sure God will richly bless you. Thank you. Please be assured that I am your partner in reaching out to new souls.

Jason Munggin
Kota Belud

Ed: We are encouraged to hear that THE PLAIN TRUTH has been a useful resource to you in ministering to your congregation and cell group. It is our pleasure and delight to continue sending you the magazine even if you are unable to support this ministry. God has provided supporters who are financially blessed to help us provide the magazine to those who are unable to make contributions.

THE PLAIN TRUTH articles are very valuable and practical. I like the Hmm... quotes from famous people like Martin Luther. Keep up the good work, well done. Congratulations! God bless.

Leong Mei Yee
Bentong

THE PLAIN TRUTH gives an unbiased view of Christianity similar to that of the mainstream denominations and it is so different from those days when Worldwide Church of God was controlled by Herbert Armstrong. Have you considered publishing the magazine online just like what the UK WCG does in order to cut cost? It is just a thought. Thank you very much for sending me the magazine.

Loh Ching
Subang Jaya

Ed: Yes, God has taken the WCG through a lot of doctrinal changes. Christianity is all about growing in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and be willing to change when new understanding and truths are revealed. Thank you for your suggestion. THE PLAIN TRUTH is available on our website: www.wcg-klang.net but we still want to have the magazine available to those wanting a hardcopy.

THE PLAIN TRUTH teaches me to live a life of truth, patience and to be aware of the surroundings that need to be appreciated. Keep up your good work of sacrifice!

Balbir Singh
Seremban

The articles are encouraging, inspiring and enriching in my journey with the Lord. It gives me greater understanding of the Word of God. In fact, THE PLAIN TRUTH is special to me. It was there at the magazine rack during one crucial night when my wife almost lost our first child at the Tung Shin Hospital.

Harold Soh
Kuala Lumpur

Ed: We are inspired and encouraged to know of your timely encounter with the Plain Truth and how it helped you in your time of need. This certainly motivates us to continue in this Work of God providing a message of practical help, hope and encouragement from a Christian perspective. We hope both mother and baby are doing well.

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH enlightening, thought-provoking and informative, especially on the bible readings. I also find the section on quotes apt and timely.

Tony R Abraham
Johor

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.

We welcome your comments. Letters for this section should be addressed to: "Letters to the Editor", The Plain Truth, Locked Bag 2002, 41990 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia. or sent via electronic mail to: ptasia@myjaring.net

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.

Creation *and* evolution

How did God bring about the rich variety of species on earth?

Almost 150 years ago Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*. The debate between science and religion has been fast and furious ever since. Darwin proposed that life on earth began hundreds of millions of years ago and developed by evolution through natural selection—a stark contradiction of the Christian fundamentalist view that God created everything in six literal 24-hour days.

Theologians had been arguing since the days of Augustine about how rightly to interpret the Creation account in the first chapter of Genesis, but Darwin's revolutionary ideas gave the debate a new face. "If you don't believe Genesis 1 is literally true, then you are questioning the whole Bible," evolution's opponents declared. "Reject evolution and you lock yourself into an anti-scientific worldview that blocks progress," its supporters argued.

Have you ever wanted simply to talk about the issue in a calm and reasonable way, without being made to look foolish, ignorant or hostile either to the Bible or to scientific discovery? Perhaps such a conversation would go something like this:

I'm confused. I'm not a theologian and I'm not a scientist. But I know what the Bible says about how life began, and I also know basically how the theory of evolution explains it. They can't both be right, can they? So who do I believe—God or the scientists?

That's a good question, but it isn't quite as easy as that. This is not a straightforward "either/or" issue. There are many sides to it with a lot of misunderstanding thrown in, and it is quite understandable that you are confused, so let's look at this broad question in some detail.

I have heard that some Christian denominations have dropped their opposition to the evolutionary theory and now accept evolution by natural selection as a valid explanation of the development of life.

It's true that many major denominations have come to terms with Charles Darwin's theory, in one way or another. The Church of England has officially apologised to him for the decades of misrepresentation. However, millions of Christians still firmly reject evolution in favour of an explanation based on a more or less literal interpretation of the Genesis 1 account of Creation. This is particularly true in the United States, where some surveys show that more than half the population claims not to believe in evolution.

There are two major schools of thought on how to resolve the conflict.

Really? What are they?

One is Creationism and the other is Intelligent Design. Creationism is a term to describe the belief that the Genesis 1 account of Creation should be understood



by
John Halford

in strictly literal terms. Creationists typically believe that the seven days in Genesis 1 were 24 hours in length, and they are adamant that anything short of this literalist interpretation necessarily leads to undermining the rest of the Bible.

The problem is that such an interpretation flies in the face of scientific research, and, for many, it defies common sense. Creationism is not allowed to be taught in public schools in United States as an alternative to evolution, because it is considered a religious idea, not a scientific one. If we're realistic, we have to admit that this is true. Creationism does not offer a proven, rigorous and valid scientific alternative to evolution, but is based on a single narrow interpretation of the first chapter of the Bible.

Many Christians prefer an alternative explanation, known as "Intelligent Design" (ID). Proponents of ID accept the findings of science, but argue that evolution cannot explain certain features in the development of life. These unexplained features, or "gaps", are evidence of an "Intelligent Designer", they claim.

In an effort to skirt the ban on teaching religion as science in public schools, they do not insist that the Designer be called God. They thus hoped that ID could be taught in schools as an alternative to Darwinian evolution. But this was challenged in a historic case in York County, Pennsylvania, where it was ruled that Intelligent Design could not be classified as science, because it incorporated a supernatural element. Even though it did not specify the identity of the Designer, it was, in the court's opinion, another form of creationism.

However, it isn't just the courts who have a problem with ID. Many scientists who are also committed Christians (and there *are* many) point out that although ID may at first seem to be a plausible approach, it is dependent on an unstable "God of the Gaps" theoretical foundation.

A what?

Opponents of Darwin's theory have always pointed out that there are inconsistencies and gaps that evolution by natural selection cannot explain. For example, they point out the lack of fossils of transition species. They also make the point that when you consider the mathematical odds against even one living cell being formed by a chance combination of non-living components, there has not been enough time for evolution to have taken place. In fact, they say, the odds are so great as to be impossible, no matter how much time elapses.

These are reasonable objections—there do appear to be "gaps" in the theory of evolution by natural selection. Opponents of evolution then seize on those "gaps" as evidence of the supernatural action of the Creator, who becomes "the God of the Gaps".

The trouble is that any time further research fills in a

particular gap, the “God of the Gaps” idea loses some of its force. Breakthroughs in scientific disciplines such as molecular biology have refined the theory of evolution by natural selection and have steadily eroded what once looked like irrefutable arguments against evolution. The “God of the Gaps” domain is steadily shrinking. Not all the gaps have closed yet, and there are still some important unanswered questions. But as new research continues to uncover answers, the traditional challenges to evolution are losing ground.

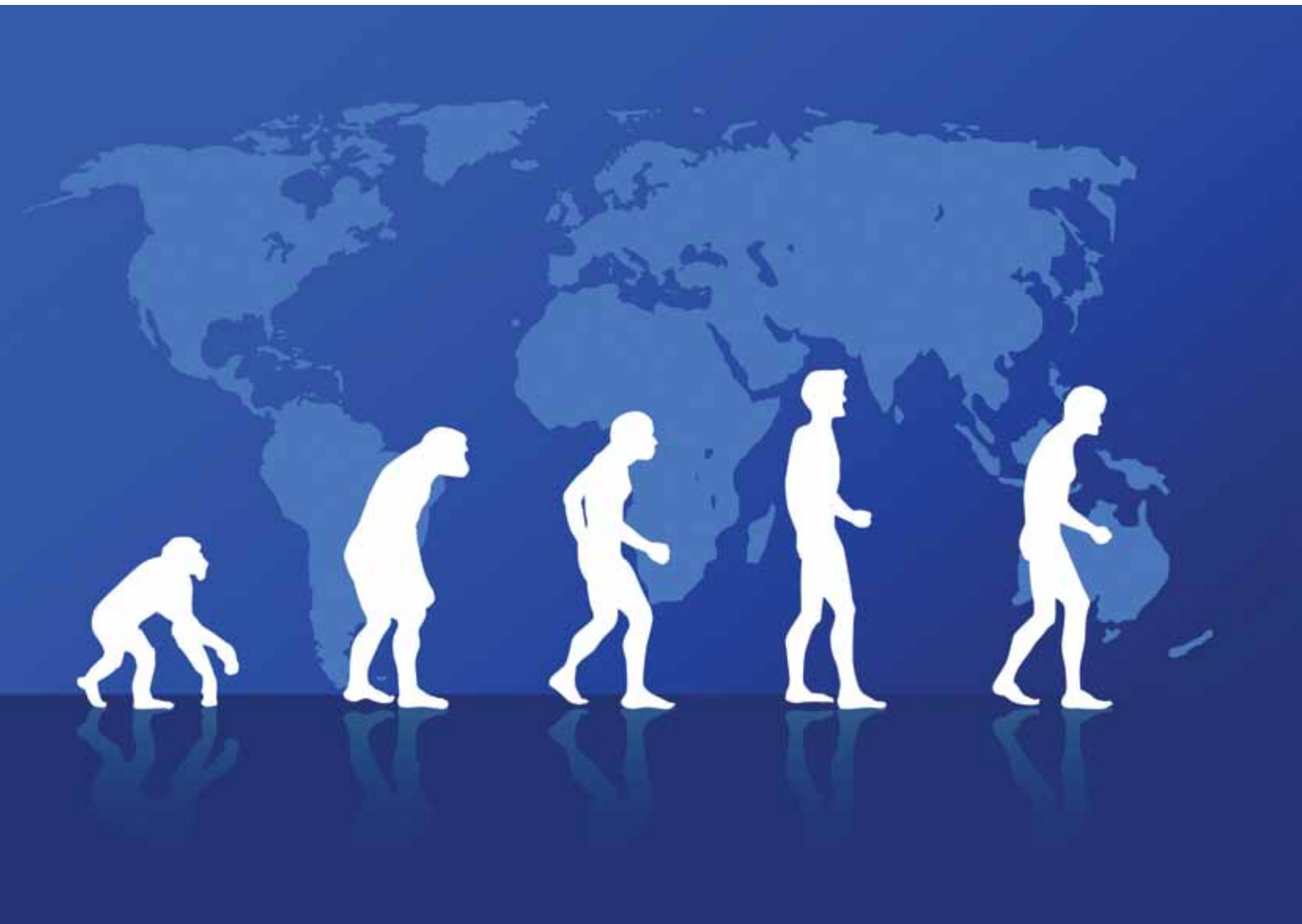
A growing number of believing scientists are recognising that to fight a rearguard action for the “God of the Gaps” is not the right approach. A fact is a fact, even if it is an inconvenient one. And if the facts show

God directly created each and every life form?

Not necessarily. The Bible only tells us that God is Creator; it says nothing about *how* He created. The scientific evidence does indicate that the various species of life have evolved over a very long period of time.

But how can we be so sure about that?

We can't be 100 per cent sure, of course. All science can do is study the evidence that has been left behind in fossil form and apply current knowledge and techniques, such as genetic science and the various radiometric dating methods, in order to form conclusions that seem in keeping with the evidence.



that evolution is the most likely explanation for the development of species, they must come to terms with it. They call themselves Theistic Evolutionists.

“Theistic Evolution” Sounds like a contradiction in terms. Maybe, but it isn't. Theistic evolutionists accept the findings of science, and see no contradiction between the theory of evolution and a proper understanding of the biblical account in Genesis 1.

But surely there is a contradiction. Evolution claims that species have evolved over hundreds of millions of years. Doesn't this contradict what the Bible says—that

What theistic evolutionists are saying is that the revelation of the Bible in no way rules out the possibility of life forms evolving through time. Although the number of theistic evolutionists is still small, they have introduced some ideas that are worth considering.

But why would God have used a process like evolution?

Why not? You could equally well ask, “Why did Creation take Him six days? Couldn't He have done it all in one instant?” But leaving the question of life for a moment, let's take a look at the way God may have brought the universe into existence.

Most scientists believe that our vast universe came into being in one “big bang” some 15 billion years ago. Not all believe this, but let’s say for argument’s sake that this *was* when and how the universe got started. At the moment of the big bang and for some considerable time afterwards, galaxies, stars and planets did not exist. The universe evolved over billions of years to a kind of soup of hydrogen atoms, and then expanded over more billions of years during which galaxies, stars, planets and other elements of the universe came into existence. Thus the universe became what it is today through gradual development, the natural consequences of God’s *original* creative act. Perhaps God also did something like that with life on earth. The point is that a process like evolution need not contradict the reality that God is Creator.

But if you accept that the universe is 15 billion years old and that life on earth is billions of years old, doesn’t that contradict the biblical revelation in Genesis 1 that God created everything in six literal days or, as a few Creationists suggest, several thousand years? It contradicts only if you insist on a literal interpretation of Genesis 1. And if you insist on a literal interpretation of this skeletal framework of days, this could *only* be six 24-hour periods.

The first problem with accepting a six-day creation is that it flies in the face of common logic and everything that has been discovered about how the universe came into existence and developed. (As you say, a few Creationists have stepped back from a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and have assigned a life to the universe in the tens of thousands of years. Their reasoning not only ignores science, but manufactures a new interpretation of Genesis 1 based on their own imagination.)

All theories of a “young universe” are contradicted by the evidence of astrophysics about the age of the universe and from geology and paleontology about the age of the earth. On the other hand, accepting an age of the universe in the billions of years does not contradict either science or the biblical witness. The Bible only says that God created all things that exist; it does not speak to the question of the *manner* of the creative process or *how long* the creative process took—or whether it is continuing even today.

Are you saying that a literal interpretation of the Bible is wrong?

It depends on the passage. Parts of the Bible that are intended to be understood literally should be understood literally, and parts that are intended to be understood figuratively should be taken figuratively. For example, some 40 per cent of the Bible consists of poetry and metaphors.

It is a *misinterpretation* of the Bible to interpret poetic statements literally. For example, God is not a literal hen, rock, tower, or shepherd, even though the Bible describes Him in such terms. Likewise, when Jesus said the Pharisees were blind guides and that they swallow camels, He did not intend for anyone

to interpret His statements literally; He intended that they be interpreted figuratively. Nor did Jesus intend that people interpret His parables as literal stories of literal people; He intended them to be understood as parables—made-up stories that illustrate a point.

It is not watering down the Bible to read it the way it is intended. Poetry should be understood as poetry, metaphors as metaphors, similes as similes, and parables as parables. “Literal” and “true” are not the same thing, and the truth is, to interpret things literally that are not intended to be interpreted literally is to *miss* the truth completely.

I hadn’t thought about it that way. So give me an example of how Genesis 1 can be interpreted in a poetic or metaphorical way.

Think of the writer of Genesis 1 as living at a time when common oral (and eventually written) traditions included creation epics that presented visible phenomena, such as the stars, the planets, the sun, moon, land, sea and animals, as gods. Some of these creation epics began with a preexistent primordial mound out of which the first god springs, who then in one way or another produces the other gods. Another variation has the sea as the first god. Such epics were the standard approach to explaining the origin of the universe.

Contrast that with the Creation story in Genesis 1. It

uses the standard style and genre of creation epics at the time. But using that standard style, it makes the radical declaration that the God of Israel, completely unlike all the gods of the nations, did not emerge from anything, nor was He ever part of the universe. Quite the contrary, this God created everything out of nothing simply by

the power of His word. Each of the things thought of by the nations as being gods is systematically presented as having been created by this God and being declared “good” by this God, demonstrating His utter power over them.

Genesis 1 is about the *Who* of Creation, not the *how*. We should let the writer of Genesis 1 make his theological statement to us about who God is as Creator in contrast with the gods of the nations and not try to interpret Him as providing us some kind of scientific police blotter of literal events and dates.

So should we be distinguishing between the fact that God created all things on one hand and how He might have caused it all to come about on the other?

Yes. There is a needless conflict between science and religion on the matter of the Creation. The biblical revelation tells us that the God who revealed Himself to Israel and who has revealed Himself to humanity in Jesus Christ is the Creator of all that exists. This revelation is not interested in detailing the physical processes He might have used to bring about this universe that humanity is part of and has, as God’s gift, both the capacity and the joy of studying and learning about.

This means that nothing factual that science can say

“...many scientists can accept the findings of science that point to evolutionary changes in the forms of life, while remaining committed to their Christian faith.”

about how the universe came into being or how the process of creation has unfolded throughout the history of the earth can contradict the biblical revelation—as long as the scientific speculation doesn't conclude that God is *not* the Creator of all that exists.

But doesn't evolutionary theory insist that everything came into existence without a Creator?

No. It's true that some scientists claim that everything came into being naturally, spontaneously—without God's original creative act. But that is a philosophical statement, not a scientific one.

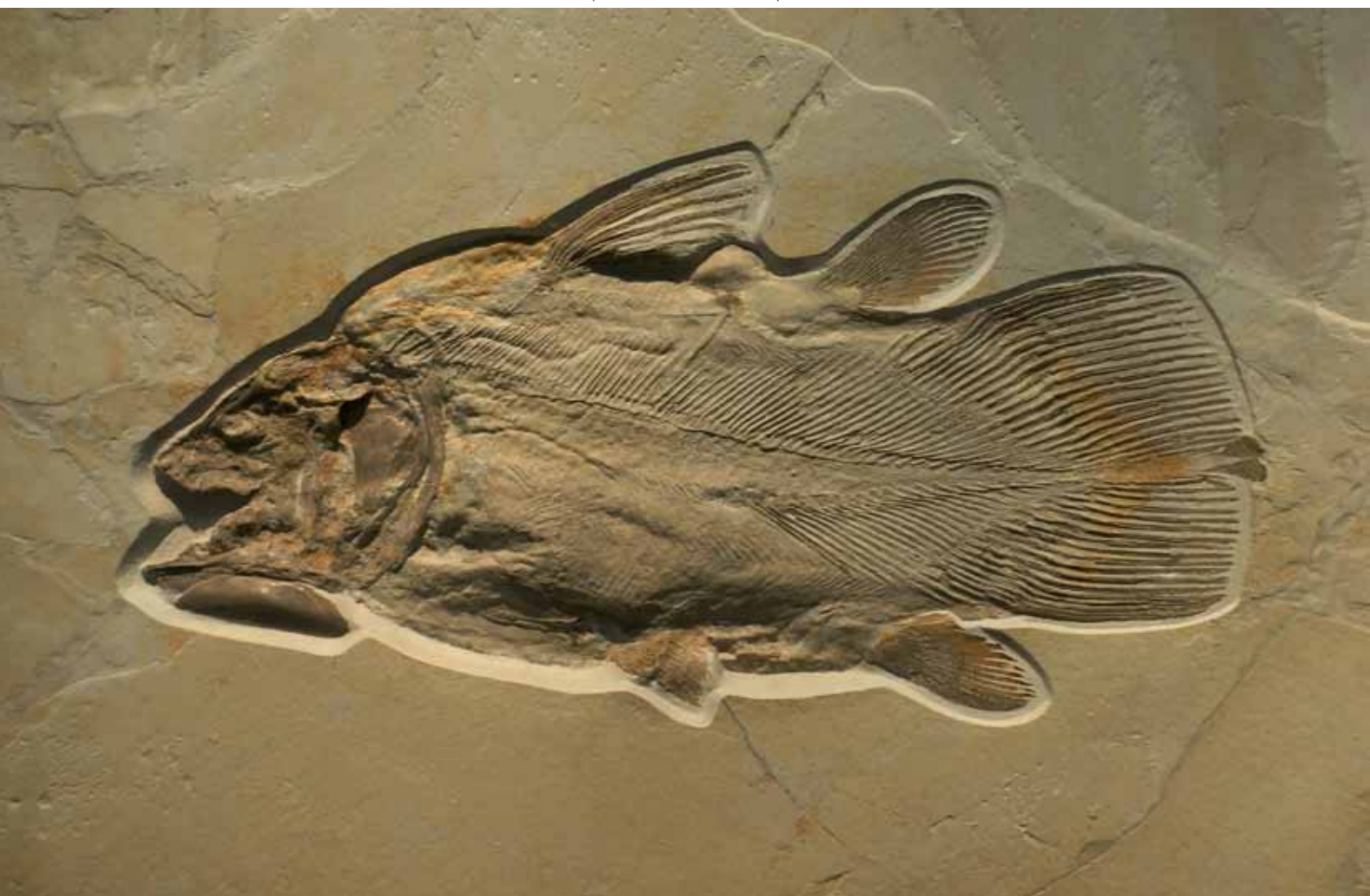
On the other hand, many scientists do believe in God, and they do not discount the biblical revelation that God is Creator. They do their scientific work by

many scientists can accept the findings of science that point to evolutionary changes in the forms of life, while remaining committed to their Christian faith, should be encouraging to the rest of us. It does not have to be an either/or argument.

In fact, it does not have to be an argument at all. Realistic scientists know that they might never uncover all the mysteries of creation.

"Take a long, hard look. See how great He is—infinite, greater than anything you could ever imagine or figure out!"¹

But as the Proverbs remind us: "*God delights in concealing things; scientists delight in discovering things.*"² We may never fully resolve these questions in this life, but it is a legitimate and exciting quest, and we



studying the physical phenomena in the universe that are the result of God's creative act. They accept that Genesis 1 tells us *that* God has created all things, but recognise that Genesis 1 does not tell us *how* the creation process has unfolded or *how long* it has taken to unfold. Scientists, using whatever evidence is available, better to understand the wonders of the amazing universe God has brought into being.

So where does that leave me—the average person? What is the proper approach for a Christian?

We suggest curiosity mixed with humility. There are strident and often angry voices raised on both sides of this question. They only make the argument increasingly bitter and the divide wider. The fact that

are discovering wonderful things along the way.

The Worldwide Church of God, publisher of this magazine, sums it up like this:

"We believe that God gave the scientific record for human instruction and knowledge and that there is no conflict between the Bible and science. We believe that when the Bible and scientific discovery appear to conflict, that one or the other has been misunderstood. Therefore, we do not deny the evidence from science that indicates a long history of life on this planet. We believe that only God can create life, and that the Creator has not revealed exactly how He has done this." □

¹ Job 36:26,
Message Bible

² Proverbs 25:2,
Message Bible

Love's hot pursuit

How are you feeling today? How have you been feeling for a while? Feeling you are in the depths of the greatest and *darkest* despair?

Cursed? Worthless? Rotten? Unloved? Unlovable? Or worse? You are engulfed by self-hatred and suicidal thoughts?

But just wait a minute! Hold whatever you are feeling first. THINK!

Why should anyone simply settle for the infamous beaten track of lovelessness when Master LOVE is hot on His pursuit for us—for you and me. Oh, Yes! Master LOVE is going ALL OUT to those longing for it, craving in fact, but always finding it most elusive. Love is entirely out of their reach and grip some how, for whatever reasons.

The question that arises then is: What kinds or types of love or *love-substitutes* are commonly being sought after? Is it popularity, power, sex, status, or what else?

God cares

The Creator GOD, ruler over all, is a LIVING fountain of *bubbling-over love*.¹ He *yearns* to share His pure and infinite love with you. He had already set His mind, His love, on us—human beings—even *before* the foundation of the world.² In the depths of your pains, sorrows and sufferings, His ever-loving *Presence* will be there with you to provide comfort, strength and healing through His Holy Spirit.

Yet TRUE love demands sacrifice. Out of love, GOD sacrificed for us His *most precious* and *only Son*. And that Son, Jesus Christ, also out of sheer love, died *willingly* for us by pouring out His precious blood on the cross. Why? So that in GOD's good time, when we are personally touched and moved by such wondrous love, it will fill us up to the brim and overflow! This love in us will continue to impact those coming into contact with us in our every-day life.

Love is POWER

With such a LIVING fountain of bubbling love in you and me *freely* flowing outwards, the wilderness in our midst will blossom like a rose or an oasis. The bleak will give way to the bright and beautiful. Out from the love of GOD also flows an abundant life—for now and for eternity!³

You may wonder WHY This Great GOD of love should ever care for such a little insignificant nobody like you—like me. All the more so when you are still down,

by
Mary Lew

'licking your wounds'—as they say.

Simple. GOD is a miracles-working God. Nothing is impossible with Him.⁴ He can transform distorted people and things around for good, provided He is desired and given the reign.

This GOD now, who is LOVE, is in hot pursuit for you and me—for us! Jesus proclaims: "Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."⁵ GOD is concerned about ALL our human problems. Big problems as well as small problems. Big problems, such as world-gripping doom and gloom, global economic meltdowns, terrorism and violence, societal problems—be it spiritual, mental or physical. He can also come down to the personal level to *heal* and *reconcile* all brokenness in every estranged relationship. Broken relationships cause *deep* pains. Such pains can be due to generation gaps, in-laws problems, family problems and individual problems.

You just name it, GOD can more than handle it!

The GOD of LOVE covers over all sins, mistakes, problems—large as well as small. He wipes them off—totally! Nothing escapes Him.⁶

In response

So believe in GOD. Trust Him. Then you can safely REST in His *tender* and *loving* embrace. Oh, intimate love!

GOD has already stretched out His arms wide open for you. Come!

It doesn't really matter even if you think you are no good, far too old, with one foot already in the coffin. Too LATE perhaps? Never! GOD still loves you and wants you as one of His beloved children.

Nor does it matter if others may think you are too young, too green, too fresh, only a child, a hot-headed teen, or an immature youngster. No good for the serious works of The Almighty GOD? Never! GOD still loves you and wants you to be a part of His glorious Kingdom.

What if you are white, or black, or brown or any mixture of all three? You think you are way beyond GOD's love, redemption or reach? Too high or too low in rankings, or social status? Only a woman? Never! Galatians 3:28 says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Any more objections?

Romans 8:37–39 silences all objections: "None of these fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm *absolutely*

*“...You may wonder WHY
This Great GOD of love
should ever care for such a
little insignificant nobody
like you—like me.”*

continued on page 20

Why did Jesus get baptised?

Have you ever wondered why Jesus was baptised? Perhaps it is not the sort of question that keeps you awake at night, but it is an interesting one to consider. Prior to the start of His public ministry, Jesus went to John the Baptist and asked him to baptise Him.

John had been announcing the impending arrival of the Kingdom of God to his fellow Jews, calling on them to repent of their sins and be baptised. When Jesus came to John and asked to be baptised, John knew that Jesus had no need of baptism. He had not committed any sins, and therefore had no sins to repent of. In fact, because John knew that he himself was a sinner, he replied to Jesus' request by saying, "I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness."¹

Why did Jesus insist on being baptised even though He had no need for it? For us to answer this question, we need to remind ourselves of why Jesus came to this earth. He came to set humanity free from the slavery of sin and deliver us from the penalty which our sins had incurred. To accomplish this, He came as a human being, as one of us, to offer God the obedience that humanity had failed to give. Jesus offered God a human life lived in perfect obedience to His law. Then, having lived a perfect life, He was able to take our sins upon Himself and pay the penalty for those sins by dying in our place.

Jesus submitted Himself to baptism because He had chosen to join Himself to a sinful humanity, who do need to be baptised. He identifies Himself with us in our sinfulness, and submits Himself to baptism for the remission of our sins. Baptism is just one aspect of His total participation in our broken lives. His baptism was our baptism, performed by a sinless human being. It was a part of His mission to fulfil all righteousness. This was why He had come to this earth: to live a life in perfect obedience to the will of the Father, and to offer up that perfect righteousness to the Father on behalf of all humanity.

The gospel is the good news that God has provided a perfect righteousness for us, which He gives us as a free gift, and which we receive through faith.² God knows that no matter how hard we might try, we will never measure up to the standard of perfect righteousness He requires. He has therefore, in His mercy, provided a perfect righteousness for us. Because Jesus has joined Himself to us in our humanity, we are joined to Him in His perfect righteousness. The Father accepts us because He has accepted the sacrifice of His Son to atone for our sins and He has clothed us with the righteousness of His Son. This is the good news of the gospel: "He who knew no sin became sin for us in order that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."³

Some people worry about their baptism. They wonder whether their baptism was effective or whether they

by
**Colin
Lauchlan**

need to be re-baptised. Some feel that they didn't understand the depth of their sinfulness at the time of their baptism, and worry that they didn't repent properly prior to baptism. Others worry that they didn't understand the meaning of baptism, and now that they have a deeper understanding maybe they should be re-baptised.

These concerns are completely unnecessary! The effectiveness of our baptism is not dependent on the depth of our repentance, nor is it dependent on the depth of our understanding, nor on the depth of our faith. The effectiveness of our baptism is dependent on the work of the One who came from heaven and joined Himself to us. If we want to know how effective our baptism was, then we need only look to Jesus' baptism: "As soon as Jesus was baptised, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.'⁴

When Jesus came up out of the waters of the Jordan River, we are told that three things occurred:

1. *The heavens were opened:* The opening of the heavens declares that in Christ all the spiritual blessings of heaven are available to those who are united to Christ in baptism. At our baptism, God opens the doors of heaven to us. We now have full access to His Presence. We now have peace with God and are invited into communion with Him through Christ in the Holy Spirit.
2. *The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus:* The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus to mark His ordination and to empower Him in His ministry. We can look back at our baptism as the time when we received the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Our receipt of the Holy Spirit is also an anointing: we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the work that God has prepared for us to do. The commission to bring the good news of God's intervention in the world was given to Jesus. And it is this same commission that He has passed on to His followers. He has instructed us to go into all the world to preach the gospel, to make disciples, and to baptise them into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁵
3. *The Father declares His approval and Jesus' Sonship:* Because Christ has joined Himself to us in our baptism, the Father says to us at our baptism, "You are my son (or daughter), whom I love; with you I am well pleased." In Christ we receive the total and complete acceptance of the Father. Jesus is the only begotten Son of the Father—we receive our sonship through adoption. But having been adopted we now share in all the rights and privileges of the true Son of God. We are now co-heirs together with Him.⁶

When we are baptised, we are united to Christ. As a result of this union we share in His life: His baptism becomes our baptism; His death becomes our death to sin; and His resurrection becomes our resurrection to a new life in Him.

There is another thing that we should notice about Jesus' baptism at the Jordan: Jesus came to John to be baptised. He did not baptise Himself. Baptism is not something that we do. Baptism is a gift that we receive.

¹ Matthew 3:14–15

² Romans 1:16–17

³ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁴ Matthew 3:16–17

⁵ Matthew 28:19–20

⁶ Romans 8:17

We stand before God and declare our sinfulness in His sight and our need for a Saviour. Baptism is then administered to us. All the blessings that God pours out upon us at our baptism are received as a free gift from Him.

We enjoy all these benefits because Jesus has fulfilled all righteousness on our behalf. ■

Imagining God

I've been watching episodes of the original *Star Trek*. The special effects of the 1960s crack me up, not to mention the costumes and hairstyles. I've been laughing out loud at the "camp and circumstance".

In this series, the crew of the starship *Enterprise* frequently encounter beings of superior intelligence.

Sometimes these beings dismiss the humans as violent and destructive, not worthy of their attention. Other times they manipulate and play with the crew, either for amusement or to accomplish their own ends. In one episode, human beings are captured and put on display in a type of zoo.

It's interesting these stories were written at a time when many seemed to be breaking away from traditional beliefs, choosing instead to believe in science. The idea of a being superior to man became passé to the more intellectual types. I remember learning what every school child learns as the basic principles of science—only trust what can be measured and duplicated. Thus God couldn't possibly exist, as He can't be seen, measured or duplicated.

I wonder if the writers imagined some of their virtual inventions might actually come true. Many devices we saw in *Star Trek* were futuristic and unbelievable, but surprisingly have been realised as technology has developed. Cell phones bear quite a resemblance to *Star Trek* communicators. Did any of them think the superior beings they also envisioned could be based on the truth?

The beings in *Star Trek* ranged from giant, disembodied brains to alien-looking creatures in

by
Tammy Tkach

ethereal robes. Some appeared as globes of light with strange voices, while others looked human but appeared and disappeared at will. All had one thing in common: extraordinary power and enlightened ideals of peace and harmony.

I find it fascinating that the original series featured

many encounters with superior beings, but later spin offs rarely did. Subsequent series seemed more concerned with fighting and conquering enemies. I guess the innocence and wonder at what might be out there gave way to cynicism, at least on the part of the writers.

I laugh when I see the enlightened beings of *Star Trek*. The writers were on the right track, but they couldn't begin to imagine the One they were subconsciously looking for. Not a disembodied brain but a living being with unimaginable powers, knowledge and wisdom. Not an alien who gets his jollies out of displaying humans in a zoo or manipulating them for fun, but a loving Father who cares for His creation and wants to adopt us as His children, with only our good in mind.

God isn't a creation of science fiction writers. He cannot be reduced to a globe of light, flitting through the universe. He's real but hard to imagine. Augustine said, "God is more truly imagined than expressed, and He exists more

truly than is imagined."

Watching old *Star Trek* episodes reminds me of how small our imaginings of God are, and at the same time, of how great He is. Let Him be praised! ■



The Great

All humanity had sinned and earned the death penalty. But because God loves us, He sent His dear Son Jesus to pay the penalty of our sin so we don't have to die. That's why Jesus came in the flesh and died on the cross. But He didn't remain in the grave; He rose and ascended to heaven. Now He is seated at the right hand of God in power and glory.

Jesus came as a *substitute* and *representative* of the human race. He lived a perfect, sinless life, but our sins condemned Him to the cross. In dying and rising, He crucified our *fallen* humanity and raised us with His *perfect* humanity. In other words, He exchanged His perfect life with our imperfect life. Some theologians call this *The Great Exchange*. This article gives you the details.

Humanity fell

Like Adam, we have sinned and fallen. We lost the knowledge of God's true purpose for us. In our twisted and distorted vision we created all sorts of false gods. We perceive God as one who is fierce, distant and unapproachable. And this has brought much fear, anxiety, misery and hopelessness. In this state, it is utterly *impossible* for us to develop an intimate relationship with God. This is our real plight today.

God created us so that we might share in His abundant life. Our fall posed a serious threat to His glorious plan. He loves us dearly and He doesn't want us to perish. After all, we are His crowning creation—created in *His* own image. His love for us is *unconditional* and our fall can never change His love for us. He anticipated our fall, so He put in place a rescue plan. This is where Jesus comes in.

God's rescue plan

God wants to *adopt* us as His own beloved children and share with us all that He *is* and *has*—that is, *everything*.¹ Why does God want to do that? To answer this we must understand the nature of God.

God is *self-giving* and *other-centred*. He exists in a *love relationship*. The Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—share intimate relationship with each other. They give of themselves to each other totally, unreservedly, withholding *nothing*. This self-giving nature is what produces joy, peace, unity, intimacy, freedom, passion, creativity and free-flowing fellowship. And God desires that we participate in His wonderful, exciting life. This is the *sole* purpose as to



by
**Dr. P.
Sellappan**

why we are here on planet earth. Until we recognise this purpose, life will continue to be a puzzle and mystery.

To execute His plan, God sent His one and only Son Jesus to the earth. Jesus came as God incarnate or God in the flesh. He came to crucify our *fallen* humanity and replace it with His *perfect* humanity. He came to *swap* our flawed, broken, confused, fearful and empty lives with His perfect, holy, joyful and satisfying life. In short, He came to *exchange* our *hellish* life with His *heavenly* life. And He will not rest until He accomplishes His mission regardless of what it costs.

Jesus destroyed our fallen nature

Jesus came to *destroy* our fallen humanity. How? He came in the *flesh*. This is a *loaded* word—it connotes carnal, prone-to-sin nature. He put on our skin and entered into our fallen world. He became as one of us, lived among us, and suffered and identified with us. He was tempted at all points. All sorts of trials and

temptations were thrown at Him. The Devil, the Pharisees and the scribes attacked Him repeatedly. One of His close disciples betrayed Him, another denied Him, and others fled when He needed them most. The crowd which hailed Him moments before now turned against Him. His own people rejected and killed Him. Jesus simply submitted to their dastardly acts without approving them. In all this, He *never* sinned. He didn't retaliate or condemn them. He simply

identified with them in their *worst* state. This is how He has *reconciled* us to God.

Jesus loved His Father with *all* His heart, mind and soul and always sought to do His Father's will. He shared intimate relationship with His Father both in His pre-incarnate and incarnate state—that is, both *before* and *after* He came in the flesh. Where we failed He succeeded. Thus He became the *first* and *only* human being to live a perfect life.

Jesus came as a *representative* of the human race. That's why He is also called the second or last Adam. He took our fallen humanity upon Himself, and by dying on the cross, He destroyed our fallen humanity. That's why St. Paul wrote "when He died, we died."²

An incident that took place in the temple at Jerusalem illustrates this graphically. You can read this in John 2:14–17. It was the Jewish Passover season. Thousands had come to worship God and offer animal sacrifices. The religious leaders who were greedy for

*“Jesus loved His Father
and did His Father's will
perfectly. In doing so, He
became the first human
being to live a perfect life.”*

Exchange

money sold these animals at exorbitant prices. Jesus was very angry. He made a whip and drove them out of the temple area. He attacked their false, hypocritical religious beliefs and practices. The temple was meant to be a place of worship, but they had turned it into an illegal money-making centre. People came there for spiritual rejuvenation, but they left the temple

death and His burial as well as our death—the death of our fallen nature—and its burial. That's why God commands believers to be baptised.

Jesus loved His Father and did His Father's will perfectly. In doing so, He became the *first* human being to live a *perfect* life. As our *substitute*, He took our broken humanity to the cross and destroyed it.



disillusioned. Their religion didn't produce the good and abundant life. That's why Jesus came to destroy their (and our) religions which only take us further and further away from God.

Christian baptism also pictures this beautifully. Our going into water pictures our acceptance of Christ's

Jesus transformed our fallen nature

Destroying our fallen humanity is only half the story. Jesus also raised us so we might appear before God holy and perfect. This state empowers us freely to participate in His glorious life.

In the same temple incident, the Jews asked Jesus

what miraculous signs He would perform to prove His authority as the One sent from God. Jesus responded by telling them that they would destroy the temple and He would *build* it in three days. By this He meant that they would kill Him and He would rise up on the third day. This prophecy was fulfilled shortly after. They killed Jesus, but He rose on the third day and ascended to the Father in heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God as the only perfect human being. He took our temple (our broken lives) and *built* it up. As our substitute, He exchanged His *perfect* humanity with our *fallen* humanity.³ This is how Jesus has transformed us.

The second part of the Christian baptism also pictures this beautifully. After we are *immersed* into the water, we come out of it (lest we die!). This pictures our acceptance of Christ's resurrection as well as our resurrection to a *new* life in Christ. That's why St. Paul exclaimed: "He rose, and we rose."⁴

Because of God's gracious act in Jesus, we are forgiven, cleansed, reconciled, raised and seated at the right hand of God as *perfect* human beings. Not that we are perfect, but to God we are, because He sees in us the perfection of Jesus. Thus as our representative and substitute, Jesus has made us holy and perfect. It's all God's doing, not based on our desperate attempts to make ourselves righteous before God.

We are included

God has included us in His Trinitarian life—in the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is sharing with us all that He *is* and *has*—that is, *everything*. He is adopting us as His own beloved children. This is the reason why we are here and this is the reason why Jesus came to the earth. There is no other purpose. In Jesus, God has done everything that needed to be done to include us in His glorious life. It is *fait accompli*, mission accomplished. The question for us now is do we want to be included in His life?

Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension have two profound implications: (1) What became of *Jesus* and (2) What became of *us* in Jesus?



In the first case, Jesus changed *form* permanently. He became God incarnate or God in the flesh. He became *Man* and dwelt with us. After His resurrection He sat at the right hand of God as *Man* in *glorified form*. He is *still* God incarnate. In this glorified state, He operates in a higher dimension, not subject to time and space as we do (in our yet-to-glorified state). He became the first perfect human being to dwell *face-to-face* with God the Father.

In the second case, God *holds* us (indeed the whole creation) together in Jesus. We are *bound* up in Jesus.⁵ That means, whatever happens to Jesus happens to us. So when He died, we died, and when He rose, we rose. He is now seated at the right hand of God as a perfect human being, so we too will be seated with God as perfect human beings. He lives in glorified state, so we too will live in glorified state. All this is true because we are *in* Jesus—*bound* up in Him.⁶

Called to make a choice

God loves us immensely and He has done everything that needed to be done to include us in His glorious life. Jesus came to settle our sin and reconcile us to God. He exchanged our broken life with His perfect life. It's all God's doing. We are simply recipients of God's

generous grace. So, all praise and glory go to God.

God is adopting us as His own beloved children and wants to share with us *everything*—all that He *is* and *has*. Of His own *free will* He has chosen to live with us. And His decision is irrevocable—He will not change His mind. That means He will always dwell with us.

Jesus is coming again to abolish all suffering, sorrows, tears, sickness and death.⁷ He is coming to *fill* our lives with His own joy, peace, security, freedom, friendship and fun. This is what God is offering us. This is the *true* gospel. But God will *not* force us to accept His offer as He respects our freedom. We must individually make a choice to accept or reject. What would be yours? □

References

Baxter Kruger, *God Is For Us*, Perichoresis Press, 2000.

¹ Romans 8:23

² 2 Corinthians 5:14–21

³ Ephesians 1:23

⁴ Ephesians 2:5–6

⁵ Colossians 1:17

⁶ Ephesians 2:4, 21–22

⁷ Revelation 21:3–4

Racial slurs—do we need them?

Have you ever been on the receiving end of a deeply insulting racial slur? I have. If there is anything that can raise my anger instantly and cause me misery for the rest of the day, it is a racial slur hurled at me by a person of a different race. In a multiracial country like Malaysia, a racial slur can become a catalyst for violence especially if it degrades one's ethnic background or religious beliefs.

Yet sadly many still use these slurs to describe a person of a different ethnicity or culture. These words are normally used privately within the confines of one's family, or friends. However, when contentions arise with members of a different race, the slurs find their way out into the open and the emotional wounds they cause are hard to heal.

Sometimes they cause a chain reaction that causes damage to relationships at the workplace or neighbourhood. The hurts are deep and reconciliation is almost impossible.

Why do people use these slurs? They originate from negative and often wrong preconceptions of people who are not of our own ethnic background, skin colour or religion. People seem to stereotype others based on certain negative opinions formed at some time in the distant past. These opinions of others are not easily forgotten and are conveniently used at times of anger or disgust. At most times such utterances are meant to hurt and belittle others. Those who use them somehow feel superior and fail to see how lowly they themselves become every time they use these slurs on others.

Perhaps the key reason why people use these slurs on others is because of the false pride that is associated with a feeling of superiority over others. People somehow want to feel superior over others. There are those who go through life thinking that their ethnic or racial background is far superior to others. Sometimes clans within the same race have misguided feelings of



by
**Devaraj
Ramoo**

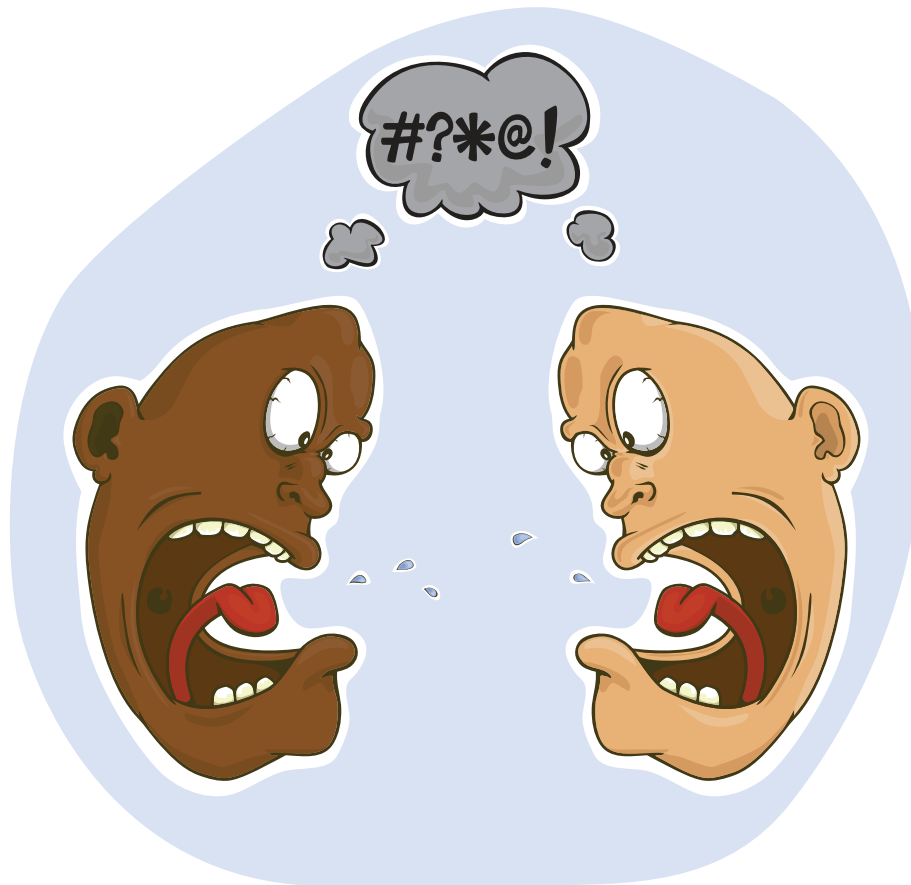
superiority over each other, thus further complicating matters. What is it in the human psyche that yearns to put down, belittle, insult and hurt others?

If there is anyone who has the right to feel superior over others it has to be God Almighty. Yet the Bible teaches that for all His infinite wisdom and power, the Word of God became a lowly human being that He may save all mankind from the consequences of sin.¹ Jesus Christ who was the Word in the beginning shared eternity with God yet never treated anyone with contempt during His earthly life. He even taught that calling someone a fool was abhorrent in the sight of God.² If Christ Himself never used a hurtful word

on others during His encounters with people and regarded all humanity as of great value by sacrificing His life for us, then how can we go around cursing, insulting and belittling the very ones for whom He gave His life?

It's time that we take another look at ourselves and check if there are any feelings of animosity towards others who do not share our ethnicity, culture or even religion. More importantly, we need to teach our children and teenagers that such behaviour can never be tolerated. The change against racial hatred begins at home when we decide that our young ones must respect and tolerate the differences in others.

The onus is on us as parents, teachers, political leaders and members of society to mould a new generation that does not evaluate others based on colour of skin or ethnic background but rather as the unique individuals that they are. This type of mindset would be the foundation of a tolerant, caring and respectful society. Would you take the lead to begin the change in your own home today? ■



¹ John 1:14

² Matthew 5:22

The single parenting challenge

There were no chairs, so we sat on the floor. Elaine (not her real name) shared the three-room, basement apartment with her five children. The only furniture was a bed and a coffee table, on which were a few cheap ornaments and a greeting card. It was a Mother's Day card, and inside, in a child's handwriting, was the simple message: "To our best friend."

Nothing I could write conveys what I want to say so eloquently as that card.

Uphill battle

To be a single parent can be a difficult and often lonely job. You must be parent and friend, judge and jury, counsellor and teacher. And you must do it without the encouragement, support and inspiration that come from sharing the responsibility of parenting with a loving mate.

"I worry sometimes that I'm not a good mother," Elaine confided in me.

"You're a wonderful mother," I quickly reassured her. "Five little people here seem to think you're the best."

A mother's love is love that comes about as close as we imperfect human beings can get to godly love.

But it isn't easy to be someone's best friend when you yourself are struggling to survive. Elaine works hard to support her family. She often works double shifts as well as taking night classes to improve her skills. Even so, there is never enough money for the necessities, let alone luxuries.

If you are a single mother like Elaine, you understand that at the end of a long day, you wish there were someone you could lean on, to share the burden and talk to. Someone to love you. Instead, there is often more worry and more work. The children need food. They need help with their homework. Their clothes need mending. They need new shoes. They need you. And that is what keeps you going. That little boy or girl, perhaps the only good thing to come from a shattered relationship, means

by
**Grace
Communion
International**

everything to you.

You want each child to be successful and to have a better life than you've had. If you are a Christian, you want them to know God as you know Him. But there are so many distractions that conspire against success. Negative influences tug and pull at your children, especially in the inner cities where so many single parents live. Sometimes it seems as if it is you against

the world, and the world is gaining on all fronts.

"I feel sorry for my Mum because she has to work hard every day, and still go to school. I love my Mum very much, and there is no one who could turn me away from her. If I have to write a book about her, it would never end," said Samantha, 14, child of single parent.

Mother power

There is one arena where you hold an unbeatable advantage. The streets may entice your children. Destructive habits may tempt them. Others may pull at their values and emotions. But there is no one else who can love them as you do.

Every teacher, counsellor, magistrate and minister knows the power of a mother's love. A mother's love is love that comes about as close as we imperfect human beings can get to the godly love the apostle Paul described in the Bible—a love that "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."¹

Sometimes that love is also blind, refusing to recognise faults that are plain to others. A mother looks for something positive in her children, even when others see little

good. Even the biggest no-hopers have a mother who hopes for the best. A mother's love for her children is as unconditional as human love can get. It is your territory and yours alone. Claim it. Move in. Occupy it. Don't give it up.

People, especially young people, are profoundly influenced by those who they feel really love them. So, what happens within the walls of your family's



home, be it ever so poor and lacking in comforts, will be a major influence—maybe the major influence—that decides what kind of people your children will eventually become as adults.

I stress eventually because there will be many times when you may feel you are not making much progress. When it comes to teaching proper values, however, the real progress often can be measured by small wins. Small wins? They are those moments when your child, after an inward struggle, chooses a right course of action. Or offers a whispered “I’m sorry” after a confrontation with you.

Shafts of sunlight

Such moments are the shafts of sunlight in an often stormy sky. They reassure you that your teaching, hoping and praying are making some difference, even if perhaps not yet the difference. Your children may make many mistakes, and often choose to do wrong. But if home is a place where right values are not compromised, at least they will know when they are wrong.

Never underestimate the influence of a loving home environment, fueled with that special love that you, and only you, can claim as your territory.

In the Bible, God reveals Himself to us as a parent. Parental love is vital in helping children develop their relationship with God. “I don’t want a father in heaven,” a little boy told me once. “Fathers beat you up.”

Learning about God

Children can learn something positive about what God is like by the way you love them. Your children need to experience unconditional love and acceptance. Help them understand, by the way you treat them, the need for correction and discipline when they do wrong. And give them total forgiveness and reconciliation when they are sorry for what they have done.

Recognise and praise your children when they choose right. This is so important.

An inmate serving a long sentence at a maximum security prison once told me: “As I grew up the only thing I ever got recognition for was the things I did wrong. So even when I became a Christian, it was difficult to have the incentive to do right.”

Be careful to set the right example in your own relationships and social life. Your love may be the only safe harbour your children know in a turbulent ocean. Be sensitive to anything that might seem to threaten it.

We “come as a set”

A strikingly beautiful young mother in New York told me: “Many men want me when they learn I’m not married. But I tell them that even though I’m not married, I’m not really single either. My daughter and I have a lifetime relationship, and any man who wants me must realise this. My daughter and I come as a set.”

It’s hard to give love if you have not received it. Perhaps, like so many single mothers, you come from a tragic background of abuse, and must struggle with your own feelings of inadequacy and lack of self-worth. You need a friend who understands and loves you. Jesus Christ can be that friend. Jesus understands your needs.

Jesus Christ respects and honours mothers. He deeply loved His mother, Mary, the remarkable woman chosen to bear Him, and who suffered with Him, and stood by Him at His death. Before He died, Jesus committed Mary to the care of His disciple John, referred to as “the disciple whom He loved”.² Jesus showed that He understood the needs of a woman who had loved Him with a mother’s love, and who now would have to face the world alone.

He loves you like that. So claim His love too. □

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:7

² John 19:26–27

Lozi proverb

Cattle herding is part of their occupation. Livestock is one of the measures of their wealth. They use oxen to draw carts and ploughs. The Lozi people of Western Province in Zambia also use cattle in their language to express proverbial wisdom.

A wise Lozi lover might say to his beloved bride: “*Wele yange uende na ng’ombe ufuno ulingane.*” This can be translated: “My loved one, when we get married, bring your cattle so that our riches can add up and we prosper together.”

When a bride and groom bring their cattle into one kraal, there is an immediate difference in their influence and social standing. Wealth doubles or triples. The couple together is wealthier than either of them was before adding together their cattle.

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus said, “For where two or three

**by
Kalengule
Kaoma**

come together in my name, there am I with them.”

In Christian community, our spiritual resources are strengthened as we come together in support of one another. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:16: “From [Jesus] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” In Christ, we are strong, and together in Christ, we are even stronger than we can be alone.

That’s why “*wele yange uende na ng’ombe ufuno ulingane*” is a good reminder of the admonition in Hebrews 10:25 to value assembling together as the children of God. We might not be many, but together in Christ, we are strong. □

Reflections

I remember the 60s well. Most of my memories of that time consist of the games I played and the people that I played them with. It was a happy period. The 70s, however, was a more serious time since there were numerous examinations to pass in secondary school. My working life started in the 80s, as did my marriage. The 90s brought me fatherhood and now in the late 'noughties', the reality of retirement is not that far away. Fifty years of living has come and gone just like that!

How time flies. Yes, it is an overused cliché but nevertheless it's true. In less than a year a new decade will begin. The excitement over the approach of the last millennium (Year 2000) has long been forgotten. Older readers of this magazine may identify with the saying that time can just slip through our fingers. You cannot stop or reverse the flow of time.

Life is measured in time. And just like life, for Christians time is a gift from God—however the amount each of us receives is different. No one can know in advance when our time is up.¹ That remains the province of the time-Giver.

That being so, how should time be used and life be lived? The Bible tells us that God created the different times and seasons for different purposes.² There is a time to be born and a time to die, a time to laugh and a time to cry. Similarly God wants human beings to go through different stages in life from infancy to childhood to adulthood and finally to old age for a reason. An important point in living is that we should live our age. Young girls should not try to outgrow their childhood before their time. Middle-aged men should not pretend that they are still young through their dressing and behaviour, and senior citizens should not be afraid of the process of ageing. If everyone understands this principle well, then living is a lot more pleasant and rewarding.

With each passing day we are one foot nearer to our grave or one day closer to the Lord's return. 1 Corinthians 7:29 becomes truer every day: "What I

by
**Wong
Teck Kong**

mean, brothers, is that the time is short..." Each 24-hour slot that is gone represents a portion of the gift of time that disappears. Like any talents from God, we have to give an account of how we use or not use the time given to us. We need to review how we spend our time and honestly ask whether it truly is as God intended, for His glory. No wonder the Bible says that we have to redeem the time, to repent of our misuse and abuse of time and really set our hearts on the right priorities.

In our daily living, Christians must always have both the long term and short term perspectives concerning time. A Christian's attitude towards most matters should be long term. He or she should not go for short term gain to reap long term loss. This helps to build

up patience and perseverance. Christians should shun instant gratification. At the same time a Christian must be willing to let go if need be. An example of this dual perspective is the one concerning Christ's second coming. We should have the patience and endurance to wait for a lifetime for His return and yet live our lives as if Christ will return tonight. This means we should be able to let go of our material and temporary things at any time, whenever



required.

The apostle Peter has this to say to us who still have time and lives to live. "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."³ This then is the purpose of Christian living, to be more like Christ. Whether we live long or short is not important, but rather how we live. In fact one reason some people died young could be because they have already reached the growth expected while we who are alive may still have a long way to go!

The final reflection? "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."⁴ □

¹ Ecclesiastes 9:12

² Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

³ 2 Peter 3:18

⁴ Philippians 1:21

Complete in Christ

A few of the pastors in my region are discouraged,” a district superintendent said. “They haven’t been able to rally their churches to a vision of reaching out to the community. Some have general goals, but don’t have a specific vision. Others are frustrated because the congregation isn’t supporting the vision they have.”

Let me offer a few encouraging words for such pastors—and for members in their congregations.

It’s actually good to have goals larger than we can achieve. On an individual level, Christ calls for a goal far bigger than any of us can reach. He calls us to nothing less than perfection.

In Matthew 5:48, Jesus said, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The Greek word translated “perfect” in that verse might better be rendered “complete”, or “whole”. The idea is to become



by
Joseph Tkach

because we know we are clothed not with our own righteousness, but with the righteousness of *Christ*.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:10: “...we are *God’s* workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Jesus Christ sets before us a job far beyond our abilities: to bring the gospel to the entire world.

Christian churches have been working at this for almost 2,000 years, and yet large segments of the world still have not been reached—and some areas once Christian are not Christian any more.

Still, we do not lose heart. We continue the work *because Christ lives in us*.

It is *His* work, and He will bring it to completion. We don’t need to worry about that. We just need to be faithful and trust Him to take care of His work in spite of our weakness.



the full measure of everything you were intended to be.

Now, who actually measures up to such a lofty goal?

Notice what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:13: “It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the *whole measure of the fullness of Christ*.”

No one, not even the most faithful Christian, has ever attained to the “whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

But even though we, on our own strength, are unable to achieve complete wholeness in this life, we can still strive toward it, and without discouragement,

You know, if we *were* able to achieve all our goals, we would also be tempted to take the credit. We might claim to have the right method, the right formula for success, the right wisdom or even the right level of humility!

But because we fall short, we’re reminded that the tasks set before us are, in fact, humanly impossible.

The gospel is not a human work. We can’t take credit for conversions or even for spiritual growth. Instead, we learn to rely entirely on Christ.

We are His workmanship, and knowing He works in us to do His will, we can work all the more joyfully in His service. But we can never get it all done. Our ultimate hope, and our ultimate success, is fully in Jesus alone, who is both the Author and the Perfector of our faith. □

Let the little children come

Matthew 19:13–15, Mark 10:13–15, Luke 18:15–17

My daughter proudly clasped a red poppy in her chubby little hand, so anxious to give it to Jesus. As I got closer, I could see other parents already gathering. Then I overheard the disciples harshly rebuking the mums and dads who had brought their children to be blessed. Everyone looked duly chastised as they were told that Jesus had many more important matters to attend to. Their loud, unfriendly tone actually startled and frightened some of the little ones, who began to cry.

Had I misunderstood what Jesus was like? I had previously observed His respectful and loving interaction with both young and old, especially the powerless and others regarded as insignificant.

This was a huge letdown for me. Our society doesn't validate children, especially fatherless little girls, but I had expected Jesus to be different.

I turned to go back home. But I stopped in my tracks when I heard Jesus rebuke the rebukers! He told them to let the little children come to Him, and not to hinder them because the kingdom of God belongs to them! He said, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom like a little child will never enter it."

by
**Joyce
Catherwood**

As the disciples backed off, parents hesitantly stepped forward with their children. Jesus knelt down and reached out to a wobbly toddler with a runny nose and tattered clothes. The playful little boy pulled away from his father's hand, ran to Jesus and jumped into His arms. With an enormous grin on His face, Jesus stood up. Within minutes, He was surrounded by giggling children, touching His hair, tugging on His sleeve,

crawling on His lap. Then Jesus took each child, one by one, cradling the infants and lifting the others high in the air before blessing them.

And as for my own little bundle of joy, well, we waited our turn and Jesus accepted the bright red poppy she offered Him, even though it was a little crumpled by then. He picked her up and for a few treasured moments they marvelled at the beauty of her little gift, both deciding it was their favourite flower.



Then He blessed her.

The littleness of these children contrasted sharply with the well-meaning, but overbearing disciples. These precious ones, so used to being ignored, pushed aside, even mistreated, not only received a blessing and validation from the humble Messiah, but were lifted up as tender examples of the very essence of the kingdom of God. □

continued from page 9

convinced that NOTHING—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely *nothing* can get between us and GOD's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us."

All the world of hindrances and excuses melt before the passion of God's unifying love. Jesus prayed for oneness and intimacy before His death: "I am praying... for all of them to become one heart and mind. Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you. So that they might be one heart and mind with Us."⁷ Unity. Oneness.

Love is not a lone ranger. Love does not exist in a vacuum and no man is an island. Love should be shared with members of a community, just like that of The TRIUNE GOD: Father + Son + Holy Spirit = one loving

God. Community!

That is of such vital importance that Jesus emphasized it again: "The same glory You (God) gave Me (Jesus), I gave them. So they'll be as *unified* and together as we are—I (Jesus) in them and You (God) in Me. This ONENESS... (is) evidence... that You (God) have sent Me (Jesus) and loved them, in the same way You (God) have loved Me."⁸

Inclusive love

So what are you still waiting for? God's unfailing love is always there for you.

Just come! □

- ¹ 1 John 4:8
- ² Ephesians 1:4
- ³ John 10:10
- ⁴ Luke 1:37
- ⁵ Matthew 11:28
- ⁶ Proverbs 10:12
- ⁷ John 17:20–21
- ⁸ John 17:22–23

Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace.

Jerry Bridges

I like to hear a man dwell much on the same essentials of Christianity. For we have but one God, and one Christ, and one faith to preach; and I will not preach another Gospel to please men with variety, as if our Saviour and our Gospel had grown stale.

Richard Baxter

We are consecrated and dedicated to God; therefore, we may not hereafter think, speak, meditate or do anything but with a view to His glory. We are God's; to Him, therefore, let us live and die.

John Calvin

I would put it to you, my dear hearer, have you been fruitful? Have you been fruitful with your wealth? Have you been fruitful with your talent? Have you been fruitful with your time? What are you doing for Jesus now?

C. H. Spurgeon

We ought to give thanks for all fortune: if it is good, because it is good; if bad, because it works in us patience, humility and the contempt of this world and the hope of our eternal country.

C. S. Lewis

Measure not God's love and favour by your own feeling. The sun shines as clearly in the darkest

day as it does in the brightest. The difference is not in the sun, but in some clouds which hinder the manifestation of the light thereof.

Richard Sibbes

Three things are called precious in the Scriptures: the blood of Christ is called "precious blood"; and faith is called "precious faith"; and the promises

not only to sing the doxology, but to be the doxology.

Francis Schaeffer

Jesus taught men to see the operation of God in the regular and the normal—in the rising of the sun and the falling of the rain and the growth of the plant.

William Temple

If any man ascribes anything of salvation, even the very least thing, to the free will of man, he knows nothing of grace, and he has not learned Jesus Christ rightly.

Martin Luther

Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish... With these words... my sense of inferiority, my fear of handicaps,

faith and confidence and determination in my heart which has not failed me to this day.

Mary McLeod Bethune

The more godly a man is, and the more graces and blessings of God are upon him, the more need he hath to pray, because Satan is busiest against him, and because he is readiest to be puffed up with a conceited holiness.

Richard Greenham

The saints of God are called His hidden ones. Why so? Not only because they are hidden in God's decree, and hidden in Christ's wounds, but oftentimes God hides them in a time of danger and calamity. He reserved to Himself seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal. The prophet knew not where there was one, but God knew there were seven thousand.

Thomas Watson

The deepest desire of our hearts is for union with God. God created us for union with Himself. This is the original purpose of our lives.

Brennan Manning



I love to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting station through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in.

George Washington Carver

are called "precious promises".

Thomas Brooks

God has no pleasure in afflicting us, but He will not keep back even the most painful chastisement if He can thereby guide His beloved child to come home and abide in the beloved Son.

Andrew Murray

One day all Christians will join in a doxology and sing God's praises with perfection. But even today, individually and corporately, we are

The riches of His free grace cause me to daily triumph over all the temptations of the wicked one, who is very vigilant, and seeks all occasions to disturb me.

George Whitefield

Modern mankind can go anywhere, do everything and be completely curious about the universe. But only a rare person now and then is curious enough to want to know God.

A. W. Tozer

dropped away. It meant that I, a humble Negro girl, had just as much chance as anybody in the sight and love of God. These words stored up a battery of

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:

Hmm... The Plain Truth, Locked Bag 2002, 41990 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia.

Living a li

Hebrews chapter 11 is called “the faith chapter”. I’ve read it many times. It speaks of Moses leading millions of Israelites out of Egypt through dramatic miracles. It tells of mighty heroes conquering kingdoms and defeating entire armies, brave people walking through fire unscorched, and other men and women who did remarkable exploits.

After reading this chapter I’ve often thought, “Not for me. I’m not Superman, I hope God doesn’t put *me* in any of *those* situations!” I have killed mosquitoes, but never fought an army, never walked through blazing fire, never subdued a kingdom.

This chapter has not been one of my favourites. It made me feel like my faith was pathetically meager, that is until recently when I recognised that it speaks of acts of faith which you and I *can* practise.

So let’s take a look!

Examples of faith

First, what is faith? The first verse of Hebrews 11 tells us that faith is confidence that God exists and that He will fulfil His promises.

It next mentions that through faith we understand that God formed the worlds out of nothing. Many people believe that the cosmos was not created, but that it somehow evolved or just appeared. That takes an act of faith of its own! But if you and I believe that God was the Mastermind and Maker of all that exist, we do have the right kind of faith. I do believe that God is the Creator of all things. So I *do* have some of the right kind of faith after all, and I trust that you do too!

It next mentions Abel and Cain who both gave offerings to the Lord, but Abel’s gift was pleasing to the Lord, and Cain’s was not. It seems that Cain knew how to give properly, yet for reasons not explained, he didn’t. Perhaps he gave out of formality, or grudgingly, or maybe his offering was so insignificant that it wasn’t really a sacrifice. In contrast, Abel was sincerely thankful for God’s bountiful blessings and gave out of genuine gratitude.

So here’s another example of the kind of faith that is pleasing to God—giving offerings sincerely to express thanks to God for His goodness. So how are we doing so far? Do we cheerfully give God of our time, talents and treasure?

Enoch is praised for his faith in believing that God exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek



by
Paul Hailey

Him. So likewise, we possess faith if we believe that God exists and that He reserves a heavenly bounty for us if we diligently strive to learn of Him and obey Him. We demonstrate this kind of faith through regular prayer, Bible study, worship and service to others.

Abraham is called “the father of the faithful”. God promised him a child despite being past age, and his wife Sarah being barren as well as past child-bearing age. He is praised for trusting God to fulfil His promise, even though it seemed impossible. Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”¹ Sarah at first balked at God’s promise, but later came to believe that it would be fulfilled.

We read many of God’s personal promises in scripture—to forgive our sins, to guide us through life, to resurrect us and give us everlasting life. Do we believe His promises unconditionally? If we believe that His promises will someday be reality, we have faith that God sees as righteousness.

Moses’ parents are commended for their faith while facing a desperate situation. The Egyptian Pharaoh had ordered that all male Israelite children be killed at birth. In an attempt to save baby Moses, his mother put him in a basket and placed him in the Nile River, hoping that he would be rescued. There was no other option. Even this act was dangerous, with the possibility of the baby drowning. In hopeful desperation, they did what they could and entrusted the rest into God’s care.

Moses was rescued by one of Pharaoh’s daughters, to grow up in Pharaoh’s palace.

How about us? When we grapple with predicaments that are beyond our control, do we do what we can and then in faith put the outcome in God’s care?

Moses, after learning his true identity, showed faith in leaving the pleasures and luxuries of royal living to take on the perilous task of leading millions of Israelites out of Egypt. So again, here’s another example of faith that we can emulate, not in leading millions of people, but in forsaking some of the pleasures and comforts of our life to serve God. Do we give up worldly distractions such as TV or computer time in order to commune with Him in prayer or study, or to serve our fellow man?

I don’t know about you, but I’m happy that I don’t have to fight armies or subdue lions to have faith that is pleasing to God. But in writing this, I certainly recognise areas where I can, with God’s help improve

“When we grapple with predicaments that are beyond our control, do we do what we can and then in faith put the outcome in God’s care?”

fe of faith

my faith. Perhaps you do too.

Strengthening our faith

How can we expand our personal faith? Here are some ways:

When we embrace God's word through study and by hearing it expounded by qualified teachers, our faith will grow.

Our Heavenly Father is generous, wanting to give us good gifts. So when we humbly ask Him for more faith, He will respond.

because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

He was not challenging them to send trees soaring through the air like missiles, but He was urging them, and us as His disciples, to cultivate our faith by stepping out and serving Him in ways that go beyond the basics of Christianity.

Do we prod ourselves to serve in ways that at first seem uncomfortable to us? It is when we take that step



During Jesus' ministry His disciples came to Him with this request, "Lord, increase our faith." His response to their request seems to be evasive. He answered, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it will obey you. Suppose one of you had a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat?' Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink?' Would he thank the servant

of faith that He comes alongside of us and makes our efforts fruitful.

Our Christian walk is largely one of faith. As the Apostle Paul tells us, "We live by faith, not by sight."² We do not know the future, but if we have faith in God and His magnificent promises we can continue our spiritual voyage with confidence that all of His wonderful promises will be fulfilled, and we *can* do those things that are pleasing to Him.

May God grant *you* ever-increasing faith! □

¹ Galatians 3:6

² 2 Corinthians 5:7

Come fellowship with the sponsors of The Plain Truth magazine

In Klang, Selangor, Malaysia

Worldwide Church of God meetings will be held at:
No. 98, Jalan Zapin 3A/KU5,
Mutiarara Point, Off Jalan Meru, Bandar Bukit Raja,
Batu Belah, 41050 Klang
Tel: 017-6749602 (Susan Low)

In Johor, Malaysia

Worldwide Church of God meetings will be held at:
5440B Jalan Kenari 18 (Top Floor),
Bandar Putra, Kulai
Tel: 07-2388482 (Keok Chai)

In Penang, Malaysia

Please contact Mr. Ong Eng Soon
Tel: 04-6587132 / 012-4237800

In Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia

Please contact Mr. David Ong
Tel: 09-7192528 / 017-9399373

In Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

Please contact Mr. Ranen Bhattacharyya
Tel: 088-244773 / 012-8285442

In Singapore

For latest schedule please visit www.wcg-sg.org
or contact Mr. Zachariah
Tel: 65453813