

# THE Plain Truth



A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Dec-Jan 2011

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# Rescue mission

For weeks, the miners trapped underground in Chile captured the hearts and imagination of people around the world. Utterly helpless to do anything about their plight themselves, they had no choice but to rely on the efforts of others who worked day and night to rescue them.

In many ways, the plight of the miners is an allegory of the spiritual condition of all humanity. Spiritually speaking, all of humanity has been trapped in a life-threatening environment. The Bible calls it “sin and death”. Like the miners, we are utterly helpless and unable to do anything about our dire predicament. Just as the cave-in cut off the miners from the outside world, sin is a barrier, keeping people from the life God created them to have. But there is good news—a rescue is under way!

I am sure that as they wait for rescue, the miners have explored their options. They have picks, shovels and some quite sophisticated mining equipment. Could they dig their own way out? Perhaps they tried. But the reality was that no amount of work on their part would be enough. They were in too deep. For them there, the only hope is help from above from those who care.

All humans beings are in the same condition spiritually. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. We can’t dig our way out of the deep pit of sin and alienation from God that we’re in. But God can, and has, reached down to us in our plight and rescued us through Jesus Christ.

What a great relief it must have been for the miners when, after 17 days cut off from everything, that first narrow borehole broke through. Although it was not large enough to get them out, it was a means by which food, air, and news could reach them, as well as a source of hope and encouragement through the long months of waiting. As I thought about it, I realised that each of their boreholes is like the gospel—a conduit through which God sends us the good news of our rescue from sin and death, together with sound spiritual nourishment and hope.

Sadly, the gospel is often misused to spread a

by  
**Dr. Joseph Tkach**

negative message of condemnation, fear and spiritual intimidation. It is like sending the trapped miners a steady stream of information about what is going wrong and how bad their situation is, demanding evidence that they fully understand their plight, that they really want to be rescued, and even that they start living as though they are already on the surface before the rescue can proceed.

But Jesus didn’t wait until human beings proved anything. He died for us while we were still sinners, Paul tells us twice in Romans.<sup>1</sup>

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if a survival expert could project himself through one of the slim boreholes, to wait with the miners, to pray with them and to reassure them of the reality of their rescue? That would be an act of great sacrifice—to leave the world of light

and fresh air to share the dim, narrow world of the trapped miners. And that is exactly what Jesus did for our world of sin, leaving the glory He shared with the Father to come and share with us the trials of human existence.

Those who believe that good news—the gospel—can see past the gloom of the moment and know that the joy of rescue is ahead. The gospel



is good news, not bad news. It’s all about grace and truth and hope, not fear and worry and uncertainty.

After all, that’s why the angel told the shepherds, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.”

That is the good news that the Plain Truth is committed to sharing with the readers.

May God bless you during this season of remembering the greatest gift humanity could ever receive—the Son of God becoming one of us to save us and take us home. □

<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:6,  
Romans 5:8



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# What our readers say:

The articles in the magazine are very touching and meaningful. Reading your magazine has helped me to understand Christianity and God's Word much better.

**Sagaya Mary**  
**Kuala Lumpur**

As my wife and I are growing old, THE PLAIN TRUTH and its articles in particular have lifted our spirits and have brought us much encouragement and inspiration. We are very thankful to the Almighty God who is all merciful and good to us. Keep up the good work.

**Dorai Raj**  
**Sitiawan**

I have gained a lot of knowledge about this world and God. As a housewife, I find THE PLAIN TRUTH really helpful. I read it during my free time and get to know more about life. It has opened my eyes to God—to know who He is and what He has done.

**Mangai**  
**Klang**

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH very educational and interesting. Yes, it provides a deeper knowledge of the Bible. I enjoy reading articles written by Dr. P. Sellappan and others too. Thanks to the Managing Editor, the writers and all the staff.

**Jacob K.**  
**Rawang**

Simply, it's a Christian Reader's Digest! Million thanks to all of you at THE PLAIN TRUTH. God bless you all.

**Orikan Barangin**  
**Papar**

THE PLAIN TRUTH gives me deeper understanding about God's plan of salvation. It has drawn me closer to God. Indeed, I enjoy reading all the articles. It has helped me to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. I often refer to your magazine when doing ministry in my church. Thank you and God bless you. Please continue sending me your magazine.

**Jason M Limpakan**  
**Kota Belud**

It taps on resources that are not readily available. I happen to be an active member of the Catholic Teachers'

Association (CTAM) and the articles in your excellent production add colour and depth to my CTAM presentation. I would like to congratulate all those involved in the production of this publication.

**Bro. Lawrence**  
**Kuala Lumpur**

It helps you to stop just existing and get you to start living. You are given a new life to pursue dreams which make reading THE PLAIN TRUTH worthwhile.

**Gobi**  
**Butterworth**

I have gained more spiritual knowledge from THE PLAIN TRUTH than elsewhere. The articles are simple and easy to understand.

**A V Nathan**  
**Pasir Gudang**

The articles are interesting and makes for pleasant reading. The topics covered are relevant to today's problems. Keep up the good work. Suggestion: Can you put it in the Net to cut costs?

**R Raja Nayagam**  
**Klang**

*Ed.: Thanks for your suggestion. You can access it at <http://www.wcg-klang.net/publications.html>*

It stimulates my brain and makes me happy. I will continue reading THE PLAIN TRUTH as part of my daily life and cherish every one of the articles.

**Quah Kah Seng**

The articles are a great read. THE PLAIN TRUTH provides me with a spiritual reading source. Keep up the good work.

**Josephine Shome**  
**Singapore**

The magazine is very encouraging, helpful and enlightening and shows God's plan for us. Thank you.

**Anthony Jayakaran**  
**Bukit Mertajam**

Every time I feel sad I read THE PLAIN TRUTH. It gives me strength when I am weak. I feel God is always with me.

**Airin Luaran**  
**Tamparuli**

It's a welcome breath of fresh air in

this chaotic world. The articles are enlightening and always in simple language so that one does not have to be a Bible scholar to understand God's Word.

**Steven Selvaraja**  
**Singapore**

THE PLAIN TRUTH enlightens me, gives me courage, renews my strength in the Lord, and most of all, by reading it, God becomes real to me. This gives me strength to carry on living despite the pain and sorrow in my lonely life. Because of Jesus... I live on!

**Philomena Robert**  
**Bukit Mertajam**

THE PLAIN TRUTH opens my eyes and mind to see the many wonderful things in the Bible. It encourages me to spend more time reading God's Word and my understanding has improved with the help of THE PLAIN TRUTH.

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

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# Saving face... or saving grace

Did you see the 1997 movie “Face/Off” directed by renowned Asian director John Woo and starring Nicholas Cage and John Travolta? It was about a policeman and a killer who exchanged faces by means of high-tech plastic surgery. Each took the identity and place of the other, and in their “new” life tried to hunt the other down. In the end the hero defeated the villain and managed to get back his original face, and his previous identity and life. That’s Hollywood for you.

You and I may never lose our faces so literally, not to mention getting them back, but we hate to ‘lose face’ even in a figurative sense. ‘Face’ is not about appearance or looks or bearing, but something deeper and more complex. It involves how we view ourselves and how we think others view us. It includes the concept of pride, recognition, reputation, self-worth, guilt and shame. It forms a part of human nature, and can help or hinder our interactions and relationships with other people.

The importance of face is especially ingrained in Asian cultures. Some aspects of face are good, such as giving honour, respect and deference to others. It helps us to be sensitive to others’ feelings, opinions and points of view, and reminds us to make conscious effort not to embarrass, slight or humiliate them. Rightly understood and sincerely handled, ‘face’ can enhance relations and reduce friction. This is surely commendable. Humility, care and concern are taught in practically all religions and most cultures. Even governments and nations practise face-saving in the conduct of affairs among themselves. Just read the diplomatic communiques issued after a meeting between leaders of nations to see the fine art of expressing disagreement without losing face. Concern for ‘face’, whether one’s own or another’s, is the hallmark of diplomacy and the basis of civilised relations.

## The down side

The Asian preoccupation with face, however, has some negative aspects. The problem is not ‘face’ per se, but rather the underlying core values that define and support it. These values may be cultural or societal or personal. Saving face, or rather the fear of losing it, can cause hurt feelings, offenses, stress and misunderstanding.

A friend told me about her daughter’s experience in school. The girl pointed out a mistake the teacher had made in English language class. Instead of thanking or praising the student, the teacher scolded her and refused to acknowledge or correct the mistake. In his opinion, he had lost face, felt humiliated and he would rather defend his face than own up to the truth. His face was based on pride, not humility. He thought his position of respect or authority would be undermined if he admitted his mistake.



by  
**Wong Mein  
Kong**

The flip side of the above case is the tendency of many Asian students not to ask questions or offer opinions in class, even at university level. They may feel ashamed to advertise their ignorance and lose face, or are reluctant to give any hint of challenging the lecturer and making him lose face. In both cases teaching is handicapped and learning is stifled.

Some of my women relatives agonise over invitations to wedding dinners because they have to make new clothing for such functions. They are afraid they will lose face if they wear something “old” i.e. anything that the other people (especially ladies) had seen them wearing before. Such behaviour might seem silly or funny, but the values that undergird them are real and serious. Vanity, envy or a competitive spirit can stunt us emotionally—and especially spiritually. Many readers will surely recognise the term *kiasu*, which literally means “afraid to lose” in a Chinese dialect.

Suppose an “important” guest or dignitary attends a function where he is not seated at the head table, and is not mentioned in the welcome speech. His feathers may be ruffled because his face has not been given due consideration. Imagine if there are several such VIPs among the group! Now it becomes a nightmare for the host, who will have to ensure his esteemed guests are given face or he himself will lose face. Preoccupation with face complicates social niceties, creating emotional stress and mental strain. Jesus recognised this was a problem among some religious leaders in his time<sup>1</sup> and He gave his disciples some face saving advice in a parable.<sup>2</sup>

## Masking the truth

Did you know that “hypocrite” originated from a Greek word that refers to an actor who played a part on the stage? He usually wore a mask, and in speech and action imitated the character that he represented. The use of masks and painted faces is also common in oriental opera. Unfortunately, such play-acting is not limited to the stage. We are all guilty of it sometime or other. Posturing and saying the “right” things replace our true self. We become unreal when we maintain a front and fear how we look to others. Pretence can emotionally cripple us and prevent us from having genuine loving relationships with others.

But God wants us to be true, open and honest with Him and with our fellow human beings. We cannot hide anything from God anyway. Our face, even if it looks good in the eyes of the world will never be good enough for God. We need to ask God to provide us with a new face. The Bible uses stage drama language when it tells us to “put off” our old self and “put on” the new self created in the image of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Asians generally do not like to confront each other directly, especially over something unpleasant. One reason is that they are worried one or both parties may lose face and upset the relationship. While the

motive may be noble, often the truth is suppressed, allowing both sides to operate under a misconception and to pretend that all is well. The problem remains unidentified and unresolved. Worse yet, sometimes a person may resort to praise, flattery, and white lies, or may simply agree with another in order that face is not lost. The Bible teaches us to “speak the truth in love.”<sup>4</sup> It is an attitude and a skill that we must learn and put into action.

When offences or conflicts arise and relationships are soured between people, it is very difficult to practise forgiveness and reconciliation if we allow face to get

about saving face than repairing relationships, we can start quarrels and maintain animosity and alienation that go on sometimes for generations.

Getting even or taking revenge to redeem honour is a strong component of the Eastern mindset. There is even a Chinese saying: “He who does not take revenge is not a man of honour”—a recurring theme in Chinese martial arts literature. It is also basic plotline of many action movies and even TV soap opera serials. Bearing grudges and nursing hurts in long memories are thus justified and not uncommon. In contrast, Christians are urged to be ready to forgive, and not bear grudges.



in the way! Neither side wants to take the first step if it means they have to humble themselves and risk losing face. Preserving pride and self-righteousness become more important than restoring friendship. And if the other party refuses to admit wrong or accept reconciliation, one loses even more face—at least, that is how human nature will reason. But the way Jesus Christ gave His disciples is just the opposite.<sup>5</sup> Admittedly it is simple in principle but difficult in practice, and may be one of the least obeyed commandments of our Lord. His approach nipped the problem in the bud. But if we are more concerned

That is the nature of God and Christ.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Taking the blame**

People in some cultures find this hard to accept. They feel any perceived loss intensely and will go to great lengths to avoid disgrace as a matter of honour. The price to pay for losing face can be high and the burden of guilt and shame can be unbearable. Thus a harsh unforgiving spirit towards mistakes, weakness, wrongdoing or even mishaps in life becomes the way of life. An extreme example is the Japanese tradition of *hara-kiri*—saving the family's face by taking one's



own life. A bankrupt businessman may commit suicide because he can no longer face his family, friends, business associates and society. A young girl in some rural Asian village may be put to death by her family members because she dishonoured them by marrying or even dating a boy they didn't approve of. This is what happens when a society or an individual has no other way to cope with shame, disgrace and failure. Loss of face becomes so important that it can overwhelm the common sense of human decency and distort normal feelings of love and compassion.

Many people in conservative cultures and tightly knit communities face great pressure, opposition and even persecution when they try to convert to another religious faith. Often it is not because the beliefs, teachings or practices of the new faith are thought to be wrong or bad. Rather the new religion is perceived as a threat to the tribal or group identity and long held traditions. A convert in such a situation would cause loss of face to his family, friends and community since they think he has rejected his own people and repudiated their culture. It is a situation that needs wisdom, patience, sensitivity and education. But when loss of face rears its ugly head, these characteristics are forgotten, and the convert is misunderstood, mistreated, maligned or rejected and ostracised.

#### **Facing up to face**

So face is not just an innocuous quirk of culture that merely inconveniences our lives. It can be a barrier to developing genuine relationships with people. It can be a stumbling block to learning, adapting and changing. Personal growth and development are hampered when we refuse to admit wrong or forgive mistakes. Accepting correction from others becomes difficult. Preoccupation with face can lead to self-righteousness, a false sense of self-importance on one hand, but also an unrealistic sense of guilt and a devastating sense of unworthiness on the other. We fluctuate between superiority and inferiority complexes, between boasting and self-deprecation. We become spiritually hollow because a face controls our attitudes, thoughts, emotions and relations with others.

But above all, saving face may hinder us from understanding saving grace. In many respects, the negative values underlying face are diametrically opposite to the concept of grace found in the Christian gospel and manifested by Jesus Christ in His life, death and resurrection.

Mankind had in the very beginning disgraced and dishonoured their creator God by their rebellion in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve hid themselves from God in shame. We are still doing that. We are afraid of what we look like and hide our face from God. But God wants to restore that close relationship and fellowship He enjoyed with the first humans before their disobedience. He wants his family back! He wants to reconcile with them.

So God took the first step in reconciliation to get us back to Himself by dying for us, taking the penalty for

our sins on himself while we were still sinners.<sup>7</sup> He didn't demand that we get rid of all our sins, become perfect or perform penance to qualify for mercy. He didn't demand that we restore His face and redeem His honour. God knew we just couldn't do it, so He had to act in grace through His Son Jesus Christ who redeemed and reconciled us to God.

Jesus Christ came as the Saviour of the world. He died on the cross to pay the penalty of the sins of all human beings. God loved His human creation so much that He was willing to sacrifice His own Son, in order that we can have eternal life.<sup>8</sup> He exercised grace—unmerited pardon—towards us. It is something we can never earn by ourselves or make ourselves worthy of. God freely forgives us and offers us a personal relationship with Him—if we will only admit our sinful state, our deserved death penalty, our inability to save ourselves, and accept that only Jesus can save us. In Biblical terms, this means faith and repentance. God wants to save your life, not just your face.

Are we willing to lose face and gain life? Or do we prefer to maintain face and reject grace? Saving grace is a concept at odds with worldly values, and it can be difficult for the human mind, steeped in the idea of saving face, to grasp and accept the idea. It seems too good to be true, but it is true—and it is good.

The biblical writer Paul admitted that, for his audience, preaching a crucified Christ was a stumbling block.<sup>9</sup> It did not seem a heroic image. To them Jesus was condemned and punished as a lowliest criminal by the Roman authorities and suffered an ignominious death. Crucifixion, to be nailed to a cross and left to die, was the ultimate loss of face. But Paul explained that Jesus willingly gave up His glorious privileges in heaven and

chose the extremes of humiliation on earth for the sake of saving humankind.<sup>10</sup>

So don't be afraid to look into the spiritual mirror, and see your true face.<sup>11</sup> Examine your beliefs and value system to see if they pass the test of Christ.<sup>12</sup> If not, it may be time to undergo spiritual plastic surgery and exchange your old face for a new face, one that is conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup>

When God "sees" us, He sees His beloved Son in us and "imputes" or credits His righteousness to us.<sup>14</sup> When we accept Jesus Christ to live in us, we become acceptable to God. Because we now bear the image of the Son, we never have to worry about losing face before the Father. We can face God without the guilt of sin and the fear of condemnation.<sup>15</sup> We can come boldly before His throne of grace any time we want<sup>16</sup> and talk 'face to face.' □

## *“Crucifixion, to be nailed to a cross and left to die, was the ultimate loss of face.”*

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 23:6–7

<sup>2</sup> Luke 14:7–11

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 4:21–24; Colossians 3:8–10

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 4:15

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 18:15–17

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 4:32

<sup>7</sup> Romans 5:8–11

<sup>8</sup> John 3:16

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:18, 23

<sup>10</sup> Philippians 2:6–8

<sup>11</sup> James 1:22–24

<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:5

<sup>13</sup> Romans 8:29

<sup>14</sup> Romans 4:23–24

<sup>15</sup> Romans 8:1

<sup>16</sup> Hebrews 4:1

# I'm dreaming of a Quantum Christmas

**T**he wise men who came from the East to worship the infant Jesus were the scientists of their day. Known as Magi, they studied the heavens and the earth, seeking to understand the natural world, and make sense of the supernatural.

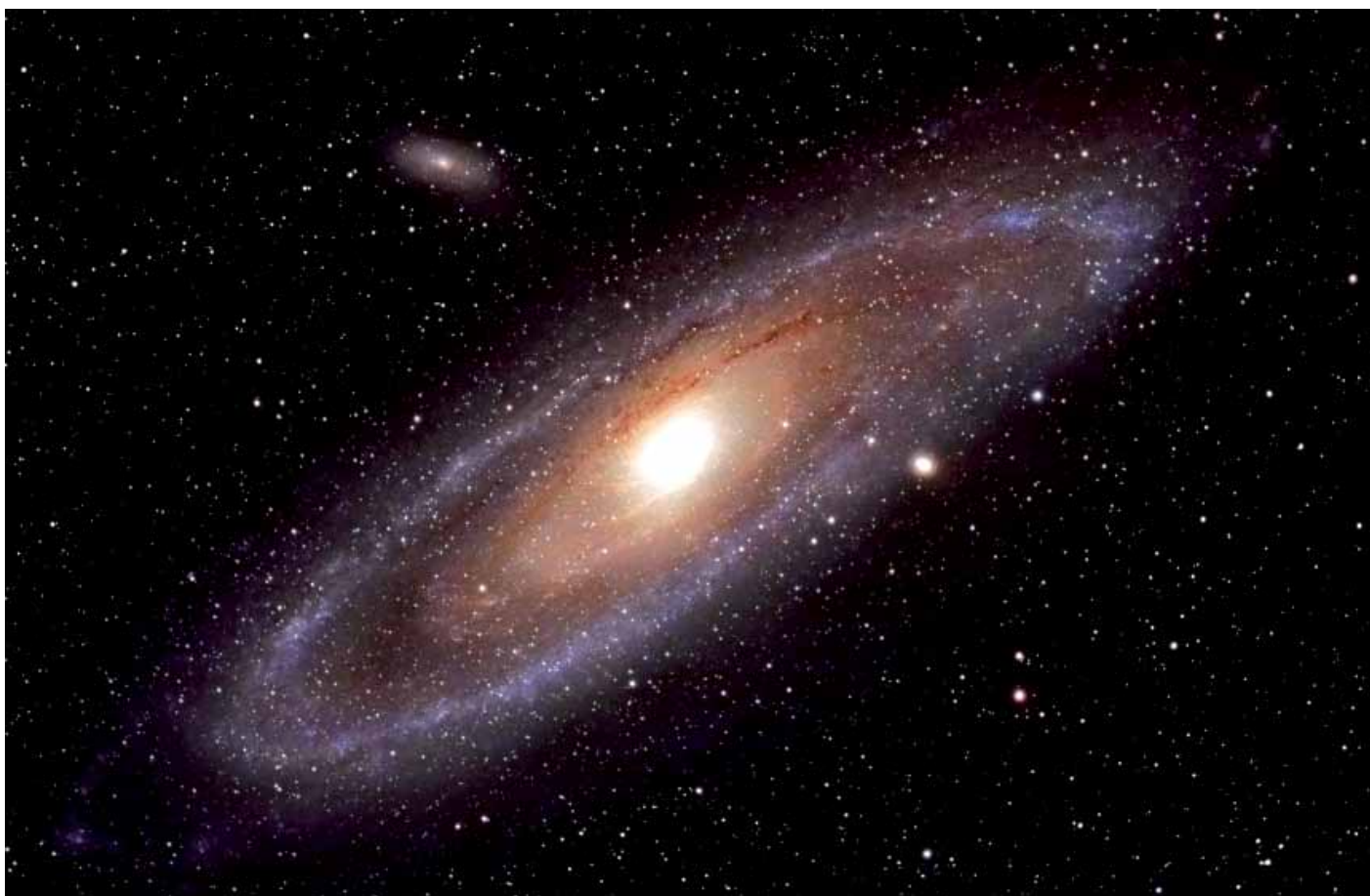
When they observed a mysterious sign in the sky, they knew it was significant. Exactly what they saw is not known. Was it a comet? A conjunction of planets? A unique special creation? Whatever it was, it guided these Magi to Jerusalem, and eventually to a house in Bethlehem where the infant Jesus was staying. There



**by**  
**John Halford**

stars are just a handful of the estimated two to three hundred billion stars in our Milky Way galaxy. And our galaxy is just one of at least 100 billion galaxies. I'm being conservative; new data from the Hubble telescope suggests there could be as many as 500 billion galaxies "out there", each with maybe 300 billion stars of its own.

We will likely never know for certain how many stars there are. Even if we did, old stars burn out and new stars come into existence every day. Astronomers have estimated that in each galaxy, one star dies and



they worshipped Him and gave Him gifts.

The heavens have always been a source of inspiration to those who seek to understand the meaning of existence. A thousand years before the Magi, King David wrote: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place, what is man that You are mindful of him, the son of man that You care for him?"<sup>1</sup>

David could have seen with the naked eye between 5,000 and 6,000 stars, and maybe five of the planets. He could not have known that some of those "stars" were galaxies, composed of millions of stars.

Today we know that those few thousand visible

one is born at the rate of about one a year. Assuming a conservative 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe, there are about 100 billion stars being born and dying each year. That means an average of about 275 million *per day*. In the time it is taking you to read this paragraph, maybe a million stars have collapsed and another million have burst into life.

There is far more going on out there than we have even begun to observe or measure. For example, about 70 per cent of the universe seems to consist of what scientists call "dark energy". By "dark" they mean it is beyond the range of our ability to measure and observe. Of the remaining 30 per cent, 26 per



cent seems to be made of “dark matter”. Only four per cent of the universe consists of material that we can measure, or even describe. And the more we learn about that four per cent, the more mysterious it becomes.

As the English astronomer Sir Arthur Eddington put it, “Not only is the universe stranger than we imagine, it is stranger than we can imagine.”

### Is God necessary?

Even with the limited understanding of his time, David could write confidently, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.”<sup>2</sup>

Well, not to everyone. In a recently published book, physicists Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow argue that a belief in God is not needed to explain the origins of the universe. They claim that the theory of quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity help us understand how universes could have formed out of nothing. They argue that the Big Bang is a consequence of the laws of physics alone. Hawking has said, “One can’t prove that God doesn’t exist, but science makes God unnecessary.”

That is a bold claim, but is it right? Physicist and science writer Paul Davies doesn’t think so. While accepting that cosmology can probably now explain how our universe began, he says, “A much tougher problem now looms, however. What is the source of those ingenious laws that enable a universe to pop into being from nothing? ...there is no compelling need for a supernatural being or prime mover to start the universe off. But when it comes to the laws that explain the Big Bang, we are in murkier waters.”

### Missing something big

Murkier waters indeed. Even if the origins of the universe can be described entirely by laws of physics, as Hawking asserts, the question remains as to how can we explain the origin of those laws? In a remarkably frank book about the state of research today, physicist Lee Smolin admitted that physics has come to an impasse. “The one thing that everyone who cares about fundamental physics seems to agree on is that new ideas are needed. From the most skeptical critics to the most strenuous advocates of string theory, you hear the same thing: We are missing something big.”

So today, our astounding investigations into the incomprehensibly vast expanse of the known universe and the equally incomprehensibly miniscule world of sub-atomic particles have not, in fact, made God unnecessary. The unfathomable night sky still reflects the glory of God and the mysterious quarks join it in proclaiming the work of His hands.

Robert J. Spitzer argues that far from doing away with the need for God, cutting edge scientific discoveries have shown even more clearly that faith is a rational response to the state of our knowledge. If the [scientific] evidence we have today is taken seriously, Spitzer writes, “...they cannot help but transform our view of the universe, transcendence, our destiny and the meaning of life.”

Twenty years ago, astronomer Robert Jastrow anticipated this situation when he wrote, “For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance, he is about to conquer the

highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.”

Reading that, it is tempting for religious people to offer a smug “We told you so.” But let’s be careful. Far from Jastrow’s picture of theologians sitting on the highest peak, theologians have more often preferred to squat complacently on the lowest slopes of scientific discovery, stubbornly clutching old ideas and resisting—sometimes viciously opposing—anything new and ground-breaking. Let’s not forget Copernicus and Galileo, whom the church attempted to silence because of their discoveries that the earth was not the centre of the universe.

Theologians, just as much as scientists, need to ask whether we are missing something big, starting with the common perception among religious people that God is a rather remote, stern Judge “out there” somewhere, who is difficult to please and preoccupied with sinful behaviour. But is that the God that Jesus came to reveal? Has our understanding of God been too narrow?

The Magi followed the star to worship Jesus because they knew His birth was in some way significant. They could not have known just how significant. They thought He was the new king of the Jews, the long-awaited Messiah. How could they know that He was, in fact, far more than that—the loving and faithful Creator of all they had studied, come to earth as a human being to heal and transform humanity into a new creation in Himself?

As His life and ministry unfolded, Jesus showed us what God is *really* like, and He and His apostles told us of the purpose of the universe and human life. The Creator became one of us, not only forgiving all our sins by taking them on Himself, but also giving us His own righteousness by becoming one with us. He died for us, rose from the dead for us and lives eternally for us, drawing us relentlessly into His new creation, into the love relationship He shares eternally with the Father and the Spirit.

As the carols remind us, “Long lay the world in sin and error pining ‘til He appeared, and the soul felt its worth,” and “Man will live forevermore because of Christmas Day.”

The brilliant lights of science, which are no more than human discoveries of what God has created, and the ancient glow of the gospel, which is nothing less than God’s revelation of His unfathomable love for all human beings, both lead us to Jesus. Through Him alone we come face to face with the Creator who not only loves us more than we have imagined, but more than we *can* imagine. □

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 8:3–4

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 19:1

# A wedding ceremony for today

I've performed many weddings using the following ceremony, which I wrote originally for my daughter and her husband several years ago.

Before each wedding I've asked the couple getting married to read through the ceremony and let me know if they see anything they think could be improved or adjusted. As a result, the ceremony now contains the unique touch of many couples.

I think it's a lovely ceremony because it moves with the culture but never strays from the bedrock reasons for marriage.

## Here it is:

"Marriage is amazing. It's the most ancient and revered tradition known to humanity, a wonderful institution which has survived and flourished through the centuries, providing enormous happiness and fulfilment for billions of us human beings. And even in its rather battered state today, marriage still attracts millions of couples, eagerly seeking the treasures it contains.

So what is it about marriage that makes it so appealing? Simply put, it is the freedom that comes from knowing you are loved—and will always be loved, despite your obvious imperfections—for nothing more than being you. We crave that love as children from our parents, we search for it as teenagers from our friends, but in marriage we find it at its best in this one incredible person who willingly and publicly declares that he or she will love you and cherish you for the rest of your lives together.

And what more could we want in this human existence of ours? At the very roots of our being, this is what we were created for—to give and receive love—believing love can tackle and overcome every obstacle, every mistake and every disagreement. And the overwhelming evidence that this is true—that such love really exists—can be seen in all those marriages that survive and even flourish in the most trying of circumstances."

## Brilliant Designer

"Such an incredibly successful design surely tells of a brilliant designer, with something wonderful and inspiring in mind. But what is it? Well, the Bible tells us that marriage was God's idea, and He designed it for one very basic and simple purpose—to help us human beings experience the kind of love He made possible, and the amazing sense of freedom His love creates.

That's why love is so important. It opens the door to a freedom you may not have believed possible, like

by  
**Jonathan  
Buck**

the freedom to be utterly real, totally transparent and even vulnerable with each other—without any fear of embarrassment whatsoever. It is for this kind of freedom that marriage was created—where there are no demands, no expectations, no guilt trips—just the overwhelming sense of relief and peace of mind that you are loved, no matter what.

That's what marriage offers, and to help you experience it to the full, God will give you all the support you need. If you ever want to know if God is real and that He really cares for you, just ask Him for the love that'll keep your marriage together and watch what happens!

And what kind of love does God have on offer? It's the kind of practical enduring love that will keep your relationship intact and your friendship growing, because it's love that is patient and kind; it doesn't bear grudges or remember wrongs; it isn't sarcastic, arrogant or accusing; it doesn't get jealous or short-tempered—it's the love that forgives, trusts and perseveres through thick and thin! That's the love God offers—and it's there for the asking at a moment's notice for both of you—to enable you to grow closer, not further apart as time goes by."

## Life at its best

"Hopefully then, it dawns on you at some point in your happily married lives—as this one dear person keeps your need to be loved constantly fulfilled—that this is life at its best, and the way life is meant to be. So, on behalf of God, may I pass on His thanks and congratulations to you both for being so willing to experience what He wants for you? And all it takes from now on is this: that you will be faithful to each other come what may—just as God is forever faithful to you."

An exchange of vows then follows, followed by a prayer by me and then the familiar exchange of rings, kiss, signing forms, publicly announcing the couple as officially married and off they go for congratulations all round.

Many people have asked me afterwards where I got the ceremony from. I told them it came from thinking about my daughter and the people she would have at her wedding. They were, like her, young and turned off religion, but open to the magic of marriage. It was that magic I wanted to capture for their sakes, because marriage still can be amazing. □



# Choosing to believe Jesus

**I**t is in choosing to believe that we believe. This teaching from Philip Yancey was dramatically illustrated by two events around the birth date of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Mary was a young Jewish virgin engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. In Judaism, virgins were young maidens usually 14 or younger, and not married. When a messenger of God, Gabriel, told her that she was favoured to give birth to the Son of God, of course she was puzzled. She had correctly understood Gabriel to mean that she would bear a child without the intervention of a man. Naturally she wondered, “How will God perform this miracle and make me, a virgin, mother of the Messiah?” Gabriel’s answer was elegant, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” Jewish tradition used the language “overshadow” for God’s presence with His people. Consider this: When God could bring forth the whole creation out of nothing, would forming a baby inside a virgin womb be too difficult for Him? In any case, Mary was informed that at the moment they were speaking, the sterile womb of her aging cousin, Elizabeth, was pregnant with child too—by the intervention of God! Gabriel reassured Mary, “Nothing is impossible with God.”

Indeed, six months earlier, Gabriel had also delivered a “baby-bearing” message to Zachariah, Elizabeth’s husband. Zachariah was an old priest, and highly respected in the community. Both he and his aging wife, Elizabeth, were righteous and faithful in keeping the Mosaic Law, but they were childless. When Zachariah was chosen by lot from about 18,000 candidate priests to offer incense to the Lord in the holy place in the Temple, he knew this was a once-in-a-lifetime occasion! What should he pray for? Should he pray for a child? Or was that too personal a prayer? Perhaps he should pray for the political deliverance of his people Israel from foreign rule. Whichever prayer he offered, God answered both concerns. He, Zachariah, would have a son who would be the forerunner of the Lord, by preparing a people ready for Him.

It must have sounded too good to be true for Zachariah—he just couldn’t, wouldn’t and didn’t believe it. (Aren’t we guilty in the same way too? How often have we prayed, yet not daring to believe that God would act for us.) And Zachariah refused to believe.

by  
**Mak Chew  
Yeng**

Regrettably nuances in the Hebrew language of Zachariah’s reply showed an element of disrespect—toward Gabriel, and therefore toward God. In fact, his response to the angel amounted to a demand for a sign! Gabriel gave him a sign all right—though not the kind of sign he had in mind! But he would have a son. What God had said would come to pass.

## Personal cost

When Mary chose to accept God’s message, she also took on risks on herself—risks of disgrace, divorce and death. She would have to face the shame of being unmarried and pregnant. And being engaged, or more accurately, betrothed to Joseph, meant she was already in the process of being married to him. By Jewish tradition, Joseph had publicly sent gifts and dowry money to her parents, and so he could claim her as his wife before their wedding day. That was why before her wedding her pregnancy could provoke a bill of divorce from him. Due to her age and gender, Mary already had no social status to start with. If saddled with the additional stigma of being a pregnant divorcee, what would happen to her? Worse, adultery incurred the death penalty under the Mosaic Law. Mary knew the prospect of disgrace and death was before her. Still, she chose to believe God.

This was only the beginning of Mary’s sorrows. She must have ached for Jesus by the way the religious authorities slandered, opposed and persecuted Him after He entered His public ministry. But her spirits must have also lifted in praises to God when God was mightily working through Him, as evidenced in His teachings and the miracles He performed. It was a roller-coaster ride for Mary as she followed the progression of Jesus’ ministry. Her deepest anguish must be the time when she stood beside the cross of her tortured Son. Jesus’ disciple, John, adopted her to be his mother from then on. So, as a believer and as the adopted mother of John, Mary would very likely be among the group to whom Jesus first showed Himself alive after His resurrection!<sup>2</sup> How her heart must have soared to the heights then! What a ride! And all this started with the quiet heroism of an exceptional teenager who expressed her belief and obedience to God, with these words, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.” □



<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:5–38

<sup>2</sup> John 20:19–20



# The Christm

Let's start this love story with two short, unrelated love stories: (1) a young lady's letter to "Dear Thelma" seeking advice about her relationship with a gentleman she met in the cyberspace and (2) a prominent businessman's billboard advertisement proposing to his fiancée if she would marry him.

The lady (let's call her Sally) asked the counsellor whether she should continue her relationship with the gentleman. He comes from another country with a different culture. He loved her very much and even sent her gifts. He promised to marry her and take her with him at the 'right' time. He assured her of a wonderful future and she need not worry about anything. He asked her simply to trust him and all her dreams would be fulfilled. Years passed by but there was no sign of his appearance. She was disappointed and became suspicious. She asked the counsellor: "Is this man real? Does he love me? Can I trust him?" The counsellor responded: "Love must be concrete, personal and demonstrative, but this guy doesn't seem to fit the bill. He could be a conman—beware!" It was probably a good piece of advice, especially with so many scams that we hear daily in the news.

In the second story, unknown to Sally, the businessman (let's call him Simon) put up a giant billboard ad with the marriage proposal: "Will you marry me, Sally?" (It doesn't matter if it was the same Sally or not.) It was a bold, catchy and costly ad, but he wanted publicly to declare his love for Sally. He wasn't shy or ashamed to tell the world how much he loved her, and he didn't mind paying the huge bill. She must have been on cloud nine—joyful and elated—when she read her fiancé's billboard ad. Who wouldn't be? Which lady would say 'no' to a marriage proposal by a smart, dynamic, affluent and affectionate prince charming?

The above stories—Sally's concern for her future and Simon's proposal to marry Sally—in some ways reflect our concern for our future and God's assurance of His love for us.

## Where are you, God?

Millions across all ages and generations have asked the questions: "Where are you, God? Do you love me? Can you bless me?" This is especially true when people go through severe trials such as when their loved ones die or when disasters (floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, wars, financial crises) strike them. We, too, ask the same questions today, don't we?

All religions assure their followers that God loves them. But many aren't convinced because God doesn't seem to intervene and solve their personal problems. So they give up on believing God while others see God as either powerless or that He doesn't care.

Many ask: "Why doesn't God come down and see our plight and do something about it? Why doesn't He solve our financial, health, relationship and environmental



by  
**Dr. P.  
Sellappan**

woes?" If God is so good and loving, He must step in and answer our cries.

Just as the counsellor has told Sally about the abstract and unreal cyberspace relationship, it is difficult to trust God unless He steps into our shoes—



into our human sufferings—and demonstrates His love for us. Merely professing "I love you" from a distance is not acceptable. That's exactly right! And that's what God has done, but do we believe and experience this reality?



# as love story

## God has come!

The truth is that God, in the person of Jesus Christ, has already stepped into our world and experienced first-hand our human condition. Jesus knows what it means to be human, to be hurting, to be rejected, to be poor

That's precisely what God has done for us in Jesus. Jesus descended from heaven so He could be with us and experience our human condition first-hand. He plunged into the depth of our fallen world filled with sin, suffering, rejection, fear, injustice, cruelty, sickness

and death, and from there He expressed His deepest love for us. He is in *complete* solidarity with us. That is why Jesus became human so that He can be our merciful High Priest and Saviour.

Christmas is the proof that God loves us and has not abandoned us. God came to dwell with us—as one of us. He *became* human in order to reveal His Father's love for us and to send us His Holy Spirit. He came to unite us to God so that we can be *one* with God.<sup>1</sup>

The Son of God, the second person in the Triune God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), came as God incarnate—as Immanuel or God with us. Born to Virgin Mary in a miraculous way, God sent His one and only Son Jesus to rescue us from sin and death and to adopt us as His own beloved children. Jesus came to unite us with God so that we can participate in the shared life of

and to be hungry. He has entered into our fallen world not only to answer our most important questions, but also to demonstrate His love for us in concrete terms. Otherwise, His love would be illusive—without any substance.

the Triune God. That is the reason why we are created and why we are here on planet earth and why we celebrate Christmas.

Jesus' incarnation—His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension—proves beyond any shadow of doubt



God's love for us. Without ceasing to be God, Jesus became a fellow human being *permanently—for us and on our behalf*. That is how strong God's love is for us.<sup>2</sup>

### Marriage pictures our union with God

God ordained marriage. It is one of the gifts God has given humanity. Marriage is for love and because of love. That's why God made man male and female. God never intended a man (woman) to live alone. He intended man and woman to marry and be of one flesh. That's why God made Eve from one of Adam's ribs—to picture intimacy, passion and togetherness. When God presented Eve to Adam, he exclaimed: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" because she came from his body.<sup>3</sup>

If you are not married (for whatever reason), take heart, there is a more glorious marriage awaiting you.

God created male and female so that a man and a woman (not the same sex) could enter into a marriage relationship and cleave to one another physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. They are to share their lives by serving one another in self-giving love—one that produces peace, joy, excitement, intimacy, unity and togetherness.

God intended human marriage to reflect the spiritual marriage of His Son Jesus to His Church which is His body. Jesus is the Bridegroom and the Church is the Bride. Jesus, who is still human (in glorified form), will descend from heaven and marry His Bride—His Church—clothed in glory.<sup>4</sup> The marriage will be between two *glorified human parties*—Jesus and us (not between a spirit and a human being). The second Adam, Jesus, will take us as His beloved wife and call us "you are bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."<sup>5</sup> The Communion we take at Church service pictures this intimacy and oneness.

Marriage is about intimacy, passion and oneness. More than that, it pictures the loving relationship (communion) that exists within the Triune God—between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is love and He extends His love to all who will accept His "Will you marry me?" proposal. The marriage union between a man and a woman pictures only faintly the spiritual union between God and Man.

### What kind of union?

The human marriage union lasts only "until death do us part". Sadly, many end before that because of conflicts, personal differences and unfaithfulness. And even those that last longer are not always happy.

God certainly wouldn't want our spiritual union with Christ to be like that of our flawed human marriages! So what kind of union will that be?

We can view our union with God at two levels:

First, when we believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit enters our lives and unites us to Christ—to His vicarious humanity. In this union, we live, move and have our being in Him.<sup>6</sup> It is intimate, similar to how the vine and branches are attached to each other.<sup>7</sup> It allows us to participate in Christ's perfect humanity which He has graciously worked out for us on our behalf.

Second, when we are united to Christ's perfect humanity, we are given free access to the Father-Son relationship—the Son's communion with the Father in the Spirit and the Father's communion with the Son in the Spirit. That means we can freely commune with the Father in the Spirit even as the Father communes

with us through His Spirit. That's why we call God 'Abba Father' and He calls us "My Beloved Sons and Daughters." It is the exact same relationship that the Father and Son had enjoyed from all eternity.

What an awesome union God has forged for us through His beloved Son Jesus and by the Holy Spirit! This extravagant gift cannot be anything but pure grace.

Our spiritual union with God is infinitely more glorious than our human marriage union. It is on a God-plane level—incredibly fabulous. All who are married (and wish that their marriage were better) and all who are not married can now look forward to marrying their Prince Charming. It will be a 'once-only' grand wedding. The Father of the Bridegroom and the Bride will be on centre stage to perform the wedding of His beloved Son Jesus and You—the Bride, adorned in dazzling white linen—to the chorus of millions of heavenly hosts singing:

"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."<sup>8</sup>

The human marriage union is a faint reflection of God's union with Man through Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit. The God-Man union will ultimately satisfy Adam's and our deepest desire and longing for God. It will finally fulfil, in a spiritual sense, the scripture: "you are now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" and "the two shall cleave and become one flesh."<sup>9</sup>

### Will you marry me?

Sally need not worry if her marriage will work out. Simon has indeed come to take Sally with him and give her a wonderful future. Your Darling Jesus has come (and will come again) to take you to His heavenly abode where there will be pleasures forevermore.<sup>10</sup> So no matter what your situation in life is, take heart, your Darling Jesus will give you all the desires of your heart.

Today, the same ad "Will you marry me?" is going out everywhere. There is hardly any place on earth where it is not advertised. Not just on one billboard, but in hundreds of billboards, newspapers, magazines, books, television screens, radio stations and websites at an astronomical cost. It has touched millions of lives so much so that they too are now actively involved in proclaiming the message.

Human marriage, no matter how good it is, is still temporary. But you have a wonderful opportunity now to enter into an everlasting relationship with God. You need not worry if this relationship is going to work. God has already made your relationship with God right through the incarnate life of His Son. The God-Man Jesus has already joined you to God and God to you—in and through Himself—through His perfect vicarious humanity. He has forged your union with God by the power of the Holy Spirit. God, who makes all things possible, is now offering you a wonderful future with Him. It's a guaranteed deal. This Christmas, He is asking you: "Will you marry me?" Would you say yes? □

<sup>1</sup> John 17:20–26

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:31–39

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:21–24

<sup>4</sup> John 17:22

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 5:30–32

<sup>6</sup> Acts 17:28

<sup>7</sup> John 15:5

<sup>8</sup> Revelation 19:6–8

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 5:31

<sup>10</sup> Psalms 16:11



# “I shall return”

World War II, considered as the deadliest conflict in human history, was responsible for the deaths of over fifty million soldiers and civilians during its course from 1939 to 1945. Most of the world's nations were involved and the opposing powers were divided into two groups, the Allies and the Axis powers. It became the most widespread war in history including human atrocities such as the holocaust and the use of the atomic bombs ending the lives of millions of people.

Japan, a member of the Axis, had its military ambitions in Asia, resulting in the invasions of Thailand, Malaya, Singapore and, after Japanese forces overcame a stubborn resistance in Corregidor of The Philippines, it took The Philippines in 1942. Allied troops suffered severe losses and the situation looked bleak. General Douglas MacArthur who was in charge of defending The Philippines was ordered to retreat to Australia. He was told that he would assume command of all United States troops.

MacArthur had to leave for Australia by ways of a treacherous journey by PT boats through Filipino waters for Mindanao, and then from Mindanao he took a ride on a bomber to Australia. Down under, he became the supreme commander of Allied forces in the southeast Pacific region. Upon arrival, he made the following statement to journalists:

“The President of the United States ordered me to break through the Japanese lines and proceed from Corregidor to Australia for the purpose, as I understand it, of organising the American offensive against Japan, a primary object of which is the relief of the Philippines. I came through and I shall return.”

The phrase “I shall return” became the powerful symbol which was the spiritual centre of Filipino resistance. It was entrenched in the hearts and minds of the Filipinos and it became the battle cry of a great underground resistance that the Japanese could not overcome. On October 20, 1944, MacArthur's forces had successfully beaten back the Japanese on Leyte in the Philippines, and just as he had promised he arrived on the USS Nashville and decided to come ashore by wading as his boat was grounded in knee deep water. He cut a majestic figure as he came ashore with his officers. He then made this historic statement:

“People of the Philippines: I have returned. By the



by  
**Devaraj  
Ramoo**

grace of Almighty God our forces stand again on Filipino soil—soil consecrated in the blood of our two peoples. We have come dedicated and committed to the task of destroying every vestige of enemy control over your daily lives, and of restoring upon a foundation of indestructible strength, the liberties of your people.”

Today after more than sixty years the vestige of “enemy control” is still rife if not more vicious in our present world. We are troubled at every corner with the enemies of war, poverty, hate, oppression and even genocide. In our daily lives we live in a war zone of criminals, racial discrimination, religious strife, poverty, disasters and diseases. Our world leaders with all their efforts, conferences, promises, pledges and oratory skills have hardly made any progress to bring world peace. Every day people suffer unimaginable horrors. Who will return to save us?



Two thousand years ago a person did walk the earth in the land of Galilee claiming Himself to be the Messiah or Saviour. The Bible states that this person named Jesus was the Word who existed with God and was also God.<sup>1</sup> Jesus is the epitome of God's love for mankind because, as scripture tells us: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus gave His life to save mankind from the

consequence of sin, that is, eternal death. But there's more to it. The Bible also states that this Saviour, Jesus, will return!

Today if we say that Jesus will return in power and glory to establish a governance of indestructible strength and liberate humanity from every chain of suffering, who will believe it? The Bible promises that the Lord will descend from heaven.<sup>3</sup> Scripture confirms that every tribe of the earth or humanity will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.<sup>4</sup> Many think that these scriptures are the ramblings of lunatics. However, if a man such as MacArthur can keep a promise to return, can Almighty God be any less trustworthy? As Christmas draws near, it is a good idea to put our hope in the saviour Jesus Christ, whose promise to return holds the key to the final and complete solution to humanity's troubles. Be assured He will return. □

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

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

<sup>3</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 24:30

# What teenagers wish their parents knew

Whenever we get a chance to talk to teens, we like to ask them this question. If there is one thing that you would like your parents to change in relating to you, what would it be? Their answers may surprise you.

In this article, we would like to share with you some of their responses and offer our comments to explain the meaning behind the answers. We hope that these answers will motivate us parents to look at our own hearts and reflect why our teens responded the way they did. Below is a list of some typical answers:

*"I wish my parents would listen more. I wish they*



by  
**George &  
Linda Kuo**

*"I wish my parents would admit their mistakes and be humble enough to say, 'I am sorry.' I would like to see their sincerity when they say that."*

Comments: This may be the hardest lesson for parents to learn. Maybe in your culture your parents never admitted making mistakes to you and certainly never would say, "I am sorry" to you. Our modern teens, however, need to see us model for them what it is to be humble and transparent. If we do that, it will be easier for our children to do the same when they make a mistake. Many parents say, "I am sorry" either with justification or without sincerity. Our teaching will not



*didn't preach to me all the time."*

Comments: Teens want to be understood by their parents. Many parents do not know that communicating with teens means listening to them, asking questions, getting into their world, and looking at things from their perspective. We do not have to necessarily agree with them, but we can ask questions and try to understand their viewpoints. If we do not have a relationship with our teens, our teaching will sound like preaching. The saying "quick to listen and slow to speak" is a good principle for parents.

be effective when what we say does not match what we do. Teens respect and appreciate parents who are humble enough to admit making mistakes, to say, "I am sorry" and to ask for forgiveness. This alone will earn their respect and admiration.

*"I wish my parents would not be on my case all the time. I wish they would not use the method of scolding or commanding all the time."*

*continued on page 18*

# Why do you want to go to heaven?

Many Christians believe that when they die they will go to heaven. But, they are not too sure what they will be doing once they get there. Which raises the question, why do they want to go there in the first place? Some think they will be gazing on the face of God for all eternity. This prospect raises some theological questions—does God have a face? Or, if by this, they mean they will be looking at the face of Jesus, are we sure that Jesus is going to be comfortable with the idea of billions of people staring at him forever? This uncertainty about what Christians will actually be doing in heaven has, of course, given the comic strip cartoonists a field day—depicting bored people sitting around on clouds with nothing to do.

The Bible teaches that the ultimate future of human beings is not to live as some ethereal spirit floating around in a heavenly realm, but to be resurrected back to life in a material body. This new body is described as a glorious body, one which will no longer be subject to death.<sup>1</sup> Our present bodies are only a shadow of this new glorified existence. These new bodies will not need to be sustained with food and water (they are not ‘physical’ bodies), but will be sustained by the Spirit of God (hence the term ‘spiritual’ bodies).

This new life will be lived, not in some far off spiritual realm, but here on earth. We do not go to heaven, heaven comes to us. This is what the apostle John saw in vision in the book of Revelation:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God’.”<sup>2</sup>

This verse is telling us that it is not we who go to

by  
**Colin  
Lauchlan**

heaven, but heaven that comes down to us. This is the ultimate answer to our prayer, “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”<sup>3</sup> God will make His dwelling place with mankind on earth.

What we see in this vision is a picture of heaven and earth coming together and being united—just as in the beginning God created man male and female, and intended that man and woman be joined in marriage and become one flesh, so, in the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth<sup>4</sup> and it was always God’s intention that heaven and earth be

joined together in one world—a world where God would dwell together with mankind.

This new heaven and new earth will be an incorruptible one. Our current universe is subject to death and decay. As Paul writes in Romans: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”<sup>5</sup>

The whole creation is waiting for the time when human beings will be raised to eternal life. And why? Because this will be the time when the creation will also be delivered from its bondage to decay.

The creation will be transformed so that it can enjoy eternity along with the children of God.

Scripture gives us a hint of how this restored earth will be transformed:

“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for





the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”<sup>6</sup>

When we read a scripture like this, we begin to realise the extent of the impact of sin on the cosmos. Apparently everything has been affected. It would appear from these verses that the law of the jungle—the survival of the fittest—was not God’s original design. Even nature has been corrupted as a result of sin—whether Satan’s or man’s.

“You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord’s renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed.”<sup>7</sup>

The thorns and briers are a reference back to Genesis 3:18, where God cursed the ground because of Adam’s sin. That curse will be reversed in the transformed creation.

These verses tell us something about our God. He did not create this present universe, and create mankind to have dominion over it; and then respond, when mankind sinned, by saying, “Well, that idea didn’t work. I am going to have to do something different.” God’s original purposes still stand. He will accomplish His will, and neither Satan’s rebellion nor our sins can prevent Him from accomplishing what He has purposed to do.

When God created the earth, He proclaimed it very good.<sup>8</sup> Creation was an act of God’s love, motivated by

a desire to share the communion of the triune God with a creature of His making. God created mankind in His image so that we might participate in God’s life of love and joy, and it was His purpose that mankind rule over, and take care of, this creation.<sup>9</sup> Mankind, as the apex of God’s creation, is designed to be a reflection of who God is, both to reflect God back to God in worship, and to reflect God to the rest of the creation in his stewardship over creation.

When mankind rejected God and chose to listen to Satan, instead of abandoning His plan, God came to rescue mankind, to redeem us from our sins and to restore our relationship with Him. He did this by joining Himself to humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. The first Adam had failed to fulfil His commission. As a human being, Jesus, the second Adam, accomplished what the first Adam had failed to do. As a result He has now been given the control of the universe, and is ruling over God’s world.<sup>10</sup> He is bringing about the transformation that will lead to a new heaven and new earth in which the saints will live with Him forever, and participate in His rulership.<sup>11</sup>

Rather than sitting around on clouds, playing harps, the redeemed people of God will be the agents of God’s love, participating with Jesus in accomplishing new creative tasks, celebrating and displaying the glory of God throughout the whole creation. ■

#### Reference

Wright, N.T. *Surprised by Hope*, Harper Collins, 2008.

- <sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:35–44
- <sup>2</sup> Revelation 21:1–3
- <sup>3</sup> Matthew 6:10
- <sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:1
- <sup>5</sup> Romans 8:19–21
- <sup>6</sup> Isaiah 11:6–9
- <sup>7</sup> Isaiah 55:12–13
- <sup>8</sup> Genesis 1:31
- <sup>9</sup> Genesis 1:28; 2:15
- <sup>10</sup> Matthew 28:18
- <sup>11</sup> 2 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 6:2

*continued from page 16*

Comments: Many parents do not have the habit of praising children when they do things right. Some parents think that by doing so will spoil their children and make them proud. The only time they feel the need to communicate is when they want to command the children to do something or scold them for doing something wrong. Instead of using the words of scolding, why not change it into a form of request or use words of encouragement and blessing? For example, when you see your son’s or daughter’s report card with three As and one C, do not say, “Why did you get this C grade here?” Or “Why didn’t you get straight As?” Instead, praise the good work of getting three As and then say something like, “Is there anything we can do to improve your learning on this subject?” Or another similar statement that will encourage them to improve their grade next time. Always let them know that they are more important than the grades in the report card.

Here is another good example of how to turn your complaint into a request. Instead of saying, “Your room is so messy,” say, “When you get a chance... I would like you to clean your room.” You can even offer to help and spend some quality time together during the process. Remember to use communication as a way to get to know your children. It is also a means to get into their world and see things from their perspective.

*“I wish my parents were not hypocrites.”*

Comments: This is a big issue when it comes to being

a parent. Our children are watching us all the time. When we are not real, they know it. If our children evaluate us as hypocrites, how can we expect our teaching to be effective? Who we are has a great impact on the kind of children we will produce.

*“I wish my parents were more expressive with their emotions. I think they love me but I just don’t feel it.”*

Comment: Many parents grew up in a family where emotions were not openly expressed. Consequently, they have a hard time expressing how they feel. These are the kind of people who have difficulty connecting with other people, including their own children. Our teenagers are growing up in a global culture that is more expressive than our generation. We, as parents, need to learn how to communicate our emotions (positive or negative) in order to build closer relationships with our children.

It is okay to convey our love to our children through verbal expression or physical touch such as patting on the shoulder or hugging or whatever is proper under the situation.

Learn how to articulate your emotions and express them in a healthy way. How we do emotionally usually determines how we do relationally. If we want to bond with our children, then learn to express our love so that our children can feel it. ■

# Messianic secret

Jesus once healed a man of leprosy and then strongly warned him not to tell anyone about it. But instead of keeping it secret, the man went right out and began speaking freely, telling everyone who would listen.

Several questions come to mind in this story, but the biggest one is Why didn't Jesus want the healed leper to tell anyone about his healing? "See that you don't tell this to anyone," Jesus had told him. But the former leper didn't obey Jesus; he immediately started spreading the news. And as a result of this man's disobedience, Mark 1:45 tells us,

"...Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere."

Today we want everyone to know about Jesus. But in His own day, Jesus did not want everyone to know about Him. Earlier in the chapter, in verse 34, we read that Jesus would not let the demons speak because they knew who He was. And in chapter eight, when Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do people say I am?" and Peter replied, "You are the Christ," Jesus responded by warning the disciples not to tell anyone about Him.

Why would Jesus want His disciples not to tell anyone about Him? Here was the visible, flesh and blood Jesus, working miracles and preaching all over the country. What better time for His followers to lead people to Him and tell them who He was?

But according to Mark, Jesus was very clear, and even stern when He said, "Don't tell anyone who I am."

Jesus knew something that neither the crowds nor his



by  
**Dr. Joseph  
Tkach**

own disciples knew: The Messiah was going to be very different from what they expected.

We're told in Mark 11: 8–10 that at the end of His ministry, when Jesus entered Jerusalem the week before He was crucified,

"...many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our Father David! Hosanna in the highest!'"<sup>1</sup>

When people heard that Jesus was the Messiah, they were happy to receive the news. The problem lay in their definitions and expectations. The people expected a king who would rally the people, and with the blessing of God, lead them to victory over their Roman conquerors and restore the kingdom of David in all its glory.

Their idea of Messiah was different from God's idea of Messiah. When they heard the term, they misunderstood it, because they had been conditioned to expect something else.

So Jesus did not want His disciples or those He healed to spread the news about Him too soon. It was not yet the right time for the people to hear. The right time for the news to be spread was after Jesus had been executed and raised from the dead.

Only then could the wonderful truth of Israel's Messiah being the Son of God and Saviour of the world begin to be understood for what it was. □

<sup>1</sup> Mark 11:8–10

# Be ye perfect

Reading "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"<sup>1</sup> reminds me of all my imperfections—which are many, to be sure. The imperfection I hate most in my life is that I'm not perfect.

Those who struggle with perfection know too well the feeling of never really being good enough. We are like those children learning to write the alphabet for the first time, who tear their papers up the second they see they have malformed a letter. It makes no difference that they made it to the "R" without a problem. If the "S" looks sloppy, out with the rubbish it goes. Practically perfect people are hard on themselves.

In psychological terms, perfectionism is the belief that perfection can and should be attained. When that belief transforms into thinking that anything less than

by  
**Barbara  
Dahlgren**

perfect is unacceptable, problems set in. Through a perfectionist's eyes, a person's self-worth is determined by flawlessness. Of course, ideas of perfection vary from person to person. Perfectionists set rigid standards of performance for themselves and sometimes for others. They never feel they "measure up."

One of my favourite movie lines comes from *Mary Poppins* when she humorously replies, "We practically perfect people never make mistakes." Poppins, as almost everyone else, links perfection to lack of mistakes. Sometimes Christians make the same error in reading the Bible. The word "perfect" is translated from the Greek word *telios*, which means finished, full-grown, mature, lacking nothing, or brought to

*continued on page 20*

# Love is...

**L**ove is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”<sup>1</sup>

When we read these verses from 1 Corinthians, we think of how we are to reflect these characteristics

of love in our own lives. We measure our behaviour, our actions and reactions toward others. As we realise we fall short of this ideal, most of us then ask God to help us have more love.

Paul was telling the Corinthians this is what love looks like, and it's a good pattern for us to follow. After all, love is the royal law mentioned in James 2:8. Love is a fruit of the Spirit and doesn't come naturally to those with carnal natures—I guess that about covers everyone.

But what if this chapter is more than a model of behaviour

for us? So many of Jesus' words and Paul's writings are seen as prescriptions for living—ideals of human behaviour we all know can never be reached. Were their words intended to be legalistic yardsticks with corresponding punishments?

Rather than a prescription, 1 Corinthians 13 seems to me a description of God. John tells us God is love.<sup>2</sup> God doesn't have love or give love and He certainly doesn't love as humans do, hot one day, cold the next, at times

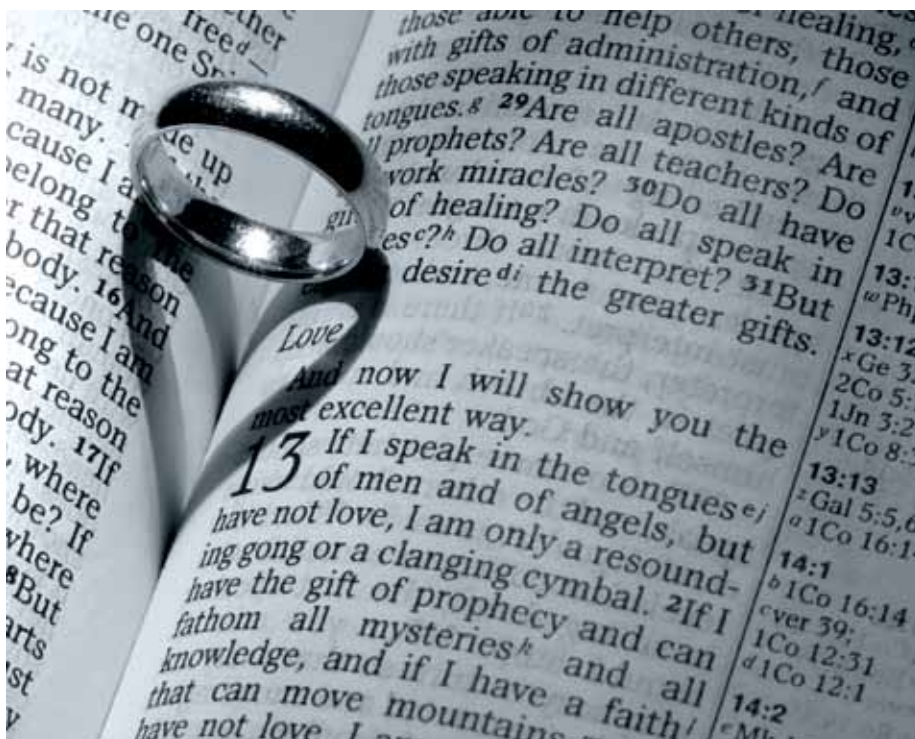
by  
**Tammy Tkach**

loyal then fickle in destructive cycles.

Substitute *God* for love in this chapter and what do you see? God is patient, God is kind. God does not envy, He does not boast, He is not proud. God is not rude, He is not self-seeking, He is not easily angered, He keeps no record of wrongs. God does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. God always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. God never fails.

This chapter is not a vehicle for judgment or condemnation of ourselves or others, but a beautiful picture of a God who didn't just give us a royal law of love but is Himself the royal law of love. We don't merely serve a God who loves us and wants us to love each other, but a God who embodies and exudes those listed characteristics of love. All of Scripture points to Jesus, who is the exact representation of the Father. We may even say that here we are presented with His résumé.

The love chapter tells us who God is and how Father, Son and Spirit interact. It shows how He treats us, provides for us and will deal with us in the future. And yes, as dearly loved children we want to be like Him. Some day we will be. But for now, don't beat yourself or anyone else over the head for falling short of this ideal. Rejoice in God who alone is ideal, perfect love. ▢



<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4–8  
<sup>2</sup> 1 John 4:8

*continued from page 19*

completeness. It is not about making mistakes or not being good enough.

God wants us to “be complete” by being spiritually one with His Son, Jesus Christ. This “perfection” is not a matter of looking good or performing flawlessly, but of Christ living in us.

The good news is that we are already perfect in God's

sight. It is a gift given freely to us. With Christ in us, we are brought to completion and we lack nothing.

Will we still make mistakes? Sure. But the perfection spoken of in this verse is not about what we do; it's about what Christ does. ▢

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:48



The great thing to remember is that, though our feelings come and go, God's love for us does not.

**C.S. Lewis**

The whole life of a Christian should be nothing but praises and thanks to God; we should neither eat nor sleep, but eat to God and sleep to God and work to God and talk to God, do all to His glory and praise.

**Richard Sibbes**

A true faith in Jesus Christ will not suffer us to be idle. No, it is an active, lively, restless principle; it fills the heart, so that it cannot be easy till it is doing something for Jesus Christ.

**George Whitefield**

Let us then ascribe the whole work of grace to the pleasure of God's will. God did not choose us because we were worthy, but by choosing us He makes us worthy.

**Thomas Watson**

They lose nothing who gain Christ.

**Samuel Rutherford**

Man, made in the image of God, has a purpose—to be in relationship to God, who is there.

Man forgets his purpose and thus he forgets who he is and what life means.

**Francis Schaeffer**

Prayer opens the heart to God, and it is the means by which the soul, though empty, is filled by God.

**John Bunyan**

The cross is laid on every Christian. It begins with the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ.

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

The reason why many are still troubled, still seeking, still making little forward progress is because they have not yet come to the end

of themselves. We are still giving some of the orders, and we are still interfering with God's working within us.

**A. W. Tozer**

Success is not fame, wealth or power; rather, it is seeking, knowing, loving, and obeying God.

If you seek, you will know; if you know, you will love; if you love, you will obey.

**Charles Habib Malik**

Let your home be your parish, your little brood your congregation, your living room a sanctuary, and your knee a sacred altar.

**Billy Graham**

The sincere convert is not one man at church and another at home. He is not a saint on his knees and a cheat in his shop. He will not tithe mint and cumin, and neglect mercy and judgment.

**Joseph Alleine**

God is the most unique being, all His works are unique: this angel, this man, this sun, this stone; in short, nothing can be found that is not a unique thing.

**Pierre Gassendi**

Let us face life as it is, not as we feel it ought to be, for it never will be what it ought to be until the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ.

**Oswald Chambers**

There is a burden of care in getting riches; fear in keeping them; temptation in using them; guilt in abusing them; sorrow in losing

Fight truth decay—study the Bible daily.

Dusty Bibles lead to dirty lives.

Come work for the Lord. The work is hard, the hours are long, and the pay is low. But the retirement benefits are out of this world.

It is unlikely there'll be a reduction in the wages of sin.

Do not wait for the hearse to take you to church.

If you're headed in the wrong direction, God allows U-turns.

Looking at the way some people live, they ought to obtain eternal fire insurance soon.

This is a ch\_\_ch. What is missing?

Forbidden fruit creates many jams.

**Anonymous**

them; and a burden of account at last to be given concerning them.

**Matthew Henry**

God gives me work till my life shall end and life till my work is done.

**Winifred Holtby**

What a child is taught on Sunday, he will remember on Monday.

**Welsh Proverb**

We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And the time will soon

come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.

**J.B. Priestley**

If the work of God could be comprehended by reason, it would be no longer wonderful, and faith would have no merit if reason provided proof.

**Pope Gregory The Great**

*Idolatry is not only the adoration of images... but also trust in one's own righteousness, works and merits, and putting confidence in riches and power.*

*The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding.*

*Faith, like light, should always be simple and unbending; while love, like warmth, should beam forth on every side and bend to every necessity of our brethren.*

*A preacher must be both a soldier and a shepherd. He must nourish, defend, and teach; he must have teeth in his mouth and be able to bite and to fight.*

**Martin Luther**

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# The Old Testament prophets

**H**ave you ever read the books of the prophets? They begin with Isaiah and end with Malachi, comprising almost 30 per cent of the Old Testament.

Much of what they wrote is difficult to understand. Martin Luther said, “They have a queer way of talking.” That’s true. Sometimes their words are eloquent, but frequently strange, and often rambling on about peculiar visions of weird creatures and obscure predictions of future events. I once heard someone refer to one of the prophets as “a crotchety old man having nightmares”. Others have commented, “I don’t like to read all that bad news; those prophets were a bunch of sourpusses.” I probably would have agreed with these assessments years ago when I glanced at some verses that told of coloured horses with mysterious riders.

Yet God inspired their writings. These men wrote as the Holy Spirit led them. “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

Typically we think of the prophets as foretellers of the future. But they often wrote about events occurring in their own time. When they did write of events in their future, many of those events are now history, such as Christ’s first coming; while other events such as Christ’s second coming are yet to be fulfilled. To add to the confusion, the timelines of many prophecies are blurred, with contemporary and future events seemingly being described in one chapter. Also, some Bible scholars believe that many prophecies will be fulfilled more than once.

With so many uncertainties, it is no wonder that we puzzle over their writings! But if we don’t understand the specific timing and details of their prophecies, we are not alone. Jesus Himself didn’t know the time of His second coming.

But we may ask, since God inspired the prophets, why are their writings so perplexing? It’s because God *deliberately* communicated in words and visions that *are* difficult to comprehend. Centuries before the prophets wrote, God told Moses that the prophets would speak in *visions and riddles*.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps God wants us to learn more from the prophets than to be able accurately to pinpoint the specifics of future events.

## The focus of prophecy is Jesus

Jesus placed great significance on the prophets, often quoting them and affirming their accuracy when He said, “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”<sup>3</sup> In undeniable terms, the prophets relate the words and actions of Jesus (the Lord of the Old Testament) as well as foretelling His coming to the earth to bring salvation to the world and eventually to establish a future kingdom of abundance, joy, and worldwide peace.



by  
**Paul Hailey**

The prophets say much about the sins and problems facing Israel and other nations at the time they wrote. In doing this, they were relaying the words of Jesus—warnings that He would punish for disobedience and bring blessings for repentance and obedience. We can read how Jesus acted with justice and mercy in dealing with sinful and repentant nations, especially Israel.

When the prophets describe sufferings brought on by sin we can understand the seriousness of these problems and our helplessness as individuals and nations to live Godly lives. Those problems are the same ones the world faces today—war, famine, death, pestilence, and injustice—all caused by sin.

The prophets expose humanity’s desperate need for a Saviour. Then in majestic terms they present a Saviour, One who will cleanse the world of sin and bring peace to the earth. In colourful language they depict a world of peace ruled by a loving Saviour and King, whom we know as Jesus Christ.

We do not understand all the places, names, and dates of historical and future events mentioned in the writings of the prophets. The prophets themselves didn’t understand all that they wrote. In fact, it is surprising to realise that God inspired their writings for *us* who are privileged to live after Christ’s first coming.<sup>4</sup> We who have the New Testament understand more than the prophets themselves did. They wrote of a Saviour who was to come centuries after their lifetimes. We who live today can look back and recognise the One they were writing about—Jesus.

Yes, the prophets focused on Jesus. He said so Himself.<sup>5</sup> The prophets even foretold some minute details about His life—His birth, His ministry, His rejection, betrayal and death. He was to have a virgin mother, to be born in Bethlehem, and to die by crucifixion. They accurately stated some of His dying words that He spoke from the cross. Most importantly, they tell of His sacrifice and atonement made on our behalf, His involvement in our lives through the Holy Spirit, and His future reign over the entire world.

## More lessons from the prophets

There are some secondary lessons we can glean from the Old Testament prophets.

First, we see that *we need God’s participation in our lives*. Our Heavenly Father knows best how we should live, and ignoring His instructions brings calamity to nations and individuals. Today God still allows us as individuals, as well as nations, to choose to follow or to disregard His way of life, and the consequences, pleasant or painful, invariably appear.

We can easily fool ourselves into thinking that we can live righteous lives based on our own ability, but we learn after a while that we simply can’t. The prophets confirm mankind’s inability to live righteously on our own strength.

As individuals we may not be able to influence



nations, but for our own welfare, let's invite His participation in our lives.

Secondly, we see from the prophets that *God uses ordinary people*. Some of the prophets were priests, possibly some were of royal lineage, but most were peasants and captives—just ordinary men. Some were lion-hearted, others were chicken-hearted. Jonah even got on a ship to try to sail away from God's call. One prophet, apparently uneducated, accurately recorded God's message, but reportedly used some bad grammar in his writings.

Their writings plainly reveal the same emotions and struggles that we all have—fear, frustration, weariness, and anger. Jeremiah for example, passionately expressed his distress, feelings of inadequacy, complaints, and depression. He wavered between

did. They often asked God why He didn't intervene in human affairs, with questions like these: "Why do you hide?", "Why do you make me look at injustice?", and "Why do you tolerate wrong?"

It's fascinating to note that God *did* respond to their confrontational questions, defending the way He was running the world. He even mentioned that He would do nothing that He wouldn't reveal to His prophets—the very ones who were complaining about His apparent secrecy.<sup>6</sup> As for His lack of miraculous intervention, He reminded the prophets that Israel's times of national repentance were short-lived, in spite of the many miracles He had worked in their midst.

God recounted His acts of love, His promises of a Messiah, and gave several detailed descriptions of a glorious world to come. The prophets eventually

realised that God knows what He is doing in spite of our human inability to see the long-range view. Even the horrible suffering of much of humanity serves a greater eternal purpose. Jeremiah, quoting God's promise to Israel, wrote this, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."<sup>7</sup>

Let's be assured that God is masterfully and meticulously working out a great plan, not just for Israel, but for all people for eternity.

Finally, the prophets give assurance that *we have a glorious future*. They foretell the return of Jesus to establish His righteous kingdom on earth, putting an end to all that is bad. Jesus will act in dramatic and powerful ways

when the time is right, and only He knows when that will be. In magnificent language the prophets tell of worldwide blessings—bountiful crops, weapons of war being re-tooled into useful instruments, the restoration of waste lands, universal prosperity and joy, and unity among nations.

Let's not overlook studying the books of the prophets, even if they are challenging. As we study them, we can rejoice in getting an overview of how Jesus is bringing the human experience to a glorious and eternal future. That is more important than trying to figure out details of future events.

Let us rejoice in Jesus, our Saviour! □



praising God in prayer to pleading with Him, blaming Him, and even accusing Him of not caring about all the sufferings that he saw.

But all of the prophets eventually did fulfil their mission and recorded God's messages. So if you and I feel inadequate at times, we are in good company. God knows our weaknesses, yet He privileges us to serve Him, sometimes in ways that exceed any expectations we may have. Let's remember—we too can serve God in spite of our individual shortcomings.

Thirdly, the prophets reveal that *God has a master plan*. God has everything under control. The flow of human events, including the rise and fall of nations, are in His Almighty hands. Nothing escapes His attention.

But in looking at our troubled world, we may ask some of the same burning questions that the prophets

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 1:21

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 12:6–8

<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:44

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 1:10–13

<sup>5</sup> John 5:39

<sup>6</sup> Amos 3:7

<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah 29:11



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