



THE **Plain Truth** ASIA

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FOR NON-MUSLIMS ONLY

Feb-Mar 2004

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God adopts you?**
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Silver linings in dark clouds

THE RECENT earthquake in Iran was tragic and devastating. At a magnitude of 6.5 on the Richter scale, it flattened an estimated 70 per cent of the buildings in Bam—a city located some 1,000 kilometers south-east of Tehran, Iran's capital. Bam is one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites—a historic city and a popular tourist attraction containing most of Iran's 2,000-year old buildings. The quake destroyed telephone lines and water and electricity supplies, homes, buildings, hospitals, and even the famous 2,000-year old citadel containing numerous artifacts of great historical value. It buried the relics of a whole civilisation. Tens of thousands of people died—as many as 50,000 by some estimates. Thousands more were injured, or left as orphans. A whole city was thrown into chaos, pain and suffering.

Moved hearts

Mohammed Khatami, the President of Iran, called the disaster a national tragedy and declared three days of mourning. He appealed for local and international help. Many nations rushed in to help, including the European Union, China, Russia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Canada, Australia, and even the United States (which is opposed to Iran's regime). They quickly dispatched rescue teams, specialised equipment, medical supplies, food, clothing, as well as financial assistance. Even poor countries with limited resources such as Turkey and Poland offered help. International agencies such as the United Nations and Red Crescent/Cross also mobilised and deployed their resources quickly to alleviate the suffering.

The disaster also moved the hearts of thousands of individuals—irrespective of race, colour, religion or creed—to express their deep sorrow, grief, and sympathy to the hurting people many of whom had lost their loved ones to death or severe injuries, besides losing whatever material possessions they had.

Unity in tragedy

The tragedy brought all nations, organisations and individuals together. It brought solidarity. People buried their racial, religious, cultural and ideological differences and stood on a common ground—to care for human life. It brought out the best in people—the capacity to love, to show kindness and compassion, to pray for one another, to help, comfort and support one another. The talents, resources and skills of half the world were harnessed—skills to quickly organise, mobilise and deploy resources, skills to co-ordinate the logistics involved, skills to carefully rescue people buried under the debris, skills to apply first-aid, treat and care for the injured, skills to provide

World Trade Center in New York, and the SARS epidemic that spread to many Asian countries, had a similar effect.

Silver linings

At the heart of the matter was concern for human lives. People cared for one another, reflecting, however briefly, that we are created in God's image. God is good, loving, merciful, gracious, kind, generous, caring and giving. Human beings created in His image have the potential to exhibit all these divine qualities. It is buried deep in our psyche, but our fallen nature has tainted the image of God in us. It takes the worst of times to bring out the best in us. Most of the time, we don't quite behave like God!

When we do, it doesn't last long. Once the shock of tragedy is past, the world gets back to business as usual—terrorism, suicide bombings, cold-blooded murders, armed robberies, rapes, greed, corruption and selfishness.

God's recreated image

It isn't too late for us to reclaim these God-like qualities. The Bible tells us that the first Adam's sin distorted the image of God in us. Adam led the way with the first sin, and we went along with him. But God sent His son Jesus Christ—the second Adam—to recreate His image in us. Jesus shed His blood on the cross to deliver us from our messed-up, sinful life. After His death He ascended to heaven to minister to us as our High Priest—to completely cleanse, purify and restore us back to His image.

God has already started that restoration process in the lives of those who have accepted Christ as their personal Saviour. When we confess our sins and accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour, He begins the transformation process—to recreate His image in us. We don't have to wait for tragedy to strike before we show the world what God is like. □



makeshift homes, skills to clear the enormous debris, skills to help rebuild peoples' lives.

Tragedy brings people together, and causes them to set aside their differences for a while. Similar tragedies such as the earthquake in China a few years back, the recent forest fires in New South Wales and California, and the terrorist attack and subsequent collapse of the

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A lesson abo

THEY WENT to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, He entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and He cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee. The teachers of the law didn't speak with their own authority. They necessarily prefaced their comments with something like "There is a saying that..." or "Rabbi Such-and-Such said..." Even the prophets rightly attributed their pronouncements to "Thus says the Lord..." But Jesus said simply, "I say to you..."

Here was a man who spoke with His own authority, not in the name of another. That alone was amazing. But if that were not amazing enough, Jesus demonstrated His authority when He told an evil spirit what to do, and the evil spirit obeyed.

In Jesus' day, evil spirits were considered, even by many Jewish teachers, to be numerous and powerful, hanging around everywhere and doing whatever they could to inflict trouble and suffering. When someone seemed to be possessed of a demon, the exorcists, whether Jewish or pagan, used complicated magical rites and spells to compel the demon to leave. The power was in the magic, it was believed, so whoever knew the right incantations and ingredients and methods could use them to bring about the unseen conditions that would manipulate the spirit world.

But Jesus was astonishingly

by
**Michael J.
Feazell**

different. When the demon-possessed man disrupted the meeting, Jesus simply ordered the demon to leave, and it left. The people in the synagogue had never seen anything like it. Who could have such authority that even the evil spirits have to obey His straightforward word?

Not authoritarian

Jesus, the Son of God, had all the authority in the world—in the universe. God created all things through Him and put all things under Him. So even these spirits that turned evil, though He allowed them to exist, were completely subject to Him (see Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:20–21).

Yet Jesus did not use His incomparable authority the way we humans tend to use our little sprigs of authority. "Man, proud man, dressed in a little brief authority", wrote Shakespeare. For many human beings, authority becomes merely a means of enriching oneself, of getting one's own way, of suppressing the truth, and of getting and holding the power to keep doing those things. Witness the parade of totalitarian regimes, corporate executive, government and ecclesiastical scandals, tyrannical parents, bosses, teachers, government officials and the like.

Not so with Jesus. He has all the authority there is, yet He uses it entirely differently from the way many people would. Let's look at a few examples:

1. He took action when necessary. Jesus did not stifle normal living by trying to prevent all possibility of something going wrong. He didn't post sentries at the doors to keep all potential demon-possessed-looking people from coming in. He simply dealt with the problem decisively when it arose.
2. He didn't overreact. Jesus didn't make a Broadway production out of making the

demon leave. He didn't knock the demon around for a while, tell it off for 10 minutes, scream at it, kill it or declare war on all demons. He just made it go.

3. He didn't crow about it. Jesus didn't use the incident to further His image. He didn't print up flyers and bill Himself as the one who tossed out the demon.

Servant authority

Jesus uses authority to serve, not to be served. And that is how He wants us to use whatever authority we might have. Whether our authority is at home, at work, or somewhere else, He wants us to use it to help others, not to make ourselves into big shots.

Later in Mark's Gospel, Jesus explained it to His disciples like this, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42–45).

What a difference it makes when the authority we're subject to is a blessing instead of a curse. "When the wicked rule, the people groan," says Proverbs 29:2. It is when authority is used to help, not to overpower, that those under it can rejoice.

Jesus doesn't overpower us to make us knuckle under. He serves us with patience and mercy, helping us grow to see how much we need Him. Sin is a cruel, harsh, manipulative, unforgiving taskmaster. Jesus is compassionate, gracious, patient, loving and merciful. The authority of sin is fraudulent, but the authority of Jesus is absolute.

ut authority



Walk with Jesus

When it comes to Jesus' authority in our lives, how do you think He uses it? To help us, or to lord it over us? Many of us live as though we think Jesus uses His authority to lord it over us. We assume His love for us is conditioned on how well we behave. We feel discouraged and fearful that God no longer loves us when we fail to measure up in our obedience.

But Jesus uses His authority to help us, not to destroy us. He drives out the demons, not us. And literal evil spirits are not the only kind of demons Jesus has authority over and drives out for us. Sin itself is an enemy that does us damage and lords over us. So are our fears and our doubts.

When our sins and fears start a commotion, it's time for us to take them to the one who knows how to handle them. We can take them to Jesus in prayer and trust Him to know what to do.

What's your enemy? What habit, what sin, what fear plagues you, saps your courage and energy? What has you beaten down, enslaved? Whatever it is, it cannot withstand the authority of Jesus. When you give these battles to Him, the complexion of the war changes—the enemy is on the run. When you stand close to Jesus, these enemies can't have the last word and can't push you around. When your attention is on Jesus, they don't seem so fearsome, so strong, because Jesus puts them into perspective as the puny weaklings they really are. In Jesus, you are bold and strong, and these bullying, fast-talking fears and sinful habits are weak and insignificant.

Why not take your needs to Jesus? Give your problems to Him and trust Him to see you through them. He's there for you, now and always. □

The road le

DURING A CAMPING TRIP with my students a couple of years ago, I was greatly inspired to see the unselfish act of a colleague whom everyone thought of as a quiet and reserved person.

It was the last day of the trip and we were all busy loading our camping gear on to our bus. Without telling us, my colleague had taken a walk to have one final look at the rapids that were the foremost attraction at the camp site. There were lots of people enjoying the cool refreshing waters of a nearby waterfall and some had made their way to the middle of some gushing rapids, perching themselves on rocks and boulders to enjoy the peaceful scene. What they did not realise was that it had been raining high up in the mountains, and the water level at the rapids had begun rising rapidly.

Three teenagers sitting on a rock in the middle of the rapids were completely unaware that they were in danger. Within minutes the water rose to a dangerous level, trapping the three teenagers. Panic stricken, they began screaming for help, but people just stood on the banks looking at them. No one did anything. But my quiet colleague shouted sternly at some able bodied men to help him cut a long bamboo pole. As the men held one end of the pole, my brave friend grasped it firmly and waded into the now dangerous waters. Slowly he made his way to the rock where the teenagers were trapped. One by one he brought them to safety. His willingness to act while others stood by saved three young lives.

What would you have done?

It's easy to stand by and watch when others are in need. That is one of the problems with life today. We prefer the easy way by not putting demands on ourselves. Yet this easy way has not brought fulfillment or contentment in our lives.

In his famous poem 'The Road Not Taken' the poet Robert Frost



**by
Devaraj
Ramoo**

presents the scenario of a traveller in a forest who comes upon a fork in the road. He ponders for a long time which road to take. One of the roads is quite worn down by constant use while the other is

grassy and probably is not much used. Remarkably, the traveller decides to take that road instead of the well worn route. He had chosen the road less travelled. The poem symbolises the choices



ss travelled

or decisions we make in life. We can all choose the easy way that everyone else follows. Few choose the challenging paths of life.

About 2,000 years ago Jesus Christ brought a new way of life to humanity. He brought new concepts that were never heard before. He taught spiritual codes of behaviour that perplexed many people. In the account of His life written by Matthew we read of some of His challenging precepts.

In Matthew 5:39 He tells us "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." This goes totally against the common reaction of people to seek revenge and 'pay back the offender'. Our movies teach us to glorify gory vengeance. In verse 44, Jesus says, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." Who would want to pray for his enemies?

The answer is—people who seek to put God and His ways first. Christ showed us God's way of life. He, being the Saviour revealed how vastly different God's ways are from ours. But He promised eternal life and salvation to those who believed and followed him in his way.

His road is not easy, and he realised that most would not choose it. "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" he warned. "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."¹

The challenges are many but highly rewarding. Just as my friend was forced to act as others watched, we too would face situations which require us to do things that go against what everyone else is doing. But as we do this, we will begin to experience a life where the Holy

Spirit leads us to experience what the Bible calls the 'fruits of the spirit'—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.² We will begin to grow in these traits. Soon we will want no other way of life.

As we travel ever further along this less travelled way of life in Christ we will begin to understand

¹ Matthews 7:
13–14

² Galatians 5:
22–23

what the traveller in the poem meant in Robert Frost's poem:-

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference." □

The Road Not Taken

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood.
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear:
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, that I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Robert Frost

Driven to distractio

IT MAY SOUND SILLY, but every time I go to recycle the rubbish, the same thought crosses my mind. I once read a newspaper story about how someone had found a terrified rabbit cowering in the local bottle bank where it had been dropped, unwanted. Now, whenever I post a bottle into the bank, and hear the glass tinkling, I wonder fleetingly if I'm traumatising a trapped pet.

It's an irrational thought and I can let it pass: It hasn't stopped me recycling my glassware, and I don't go squinting into every bottle bank I see, anxiously scanning for long, floppy ears. They may not be about bunnies in bins, but perhaps you occasionally have your own quirky thoughts. Certainly many of us experience little niggles that surface during an ordinary day: Did we turn off the iron? Lock the front door? Can we drive on *that* stretch of motorway without getting caught up in an accident? Is the baby sleeping healthily in his cot? Most of us find ways to manage such anxieties, perhaps making the odd extra check, or just recognising that they're unlikely realities. But for an estimated 2 per cent of the UK population—including children—it's a different story. These are the sufferers of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, or OCD. For such people, intrusive thoughts, images or urges are not passing notions, but come thick and fast—perhaps a dozen times an hour rather than once a day. The thoughts may be senseless or even repugnant. For example, Brian became terrified he might murder his wife, after a domestic stabbing took place down the road. But the distress created leaves the sufferer overwhelmed with anxiety, and compelled to find a means of reducing it. The result can appear as bizarre behaviour that interferes with day-to-day life.

Obsessive fears

The most common compulsions arise out of obsessive fears of becoming contaminated by germs

by
**Julia
McGuinness**

or dirt. This was the case with the late American millionaire Howard Hughes. His staff had to cope with increasingly complicated instructions about the handling of objects. When fetching his hearing aid cord from the bathroom cabinet, they had to open the bathroom door, covering their hands with 8 Kleenex tissues before touching the doorknob. They then had to wash their hands with a fresh bar of soap, using tissues to turn on the taps, and avoiding touching the basin's sides. Only then, using 15 Kleenex tissues, could they open the bathroom cabinet and remove the sealed envelope containing the cord.

Washing hands till they're red and raw; re-checking gas appliances or light switches; having objects and furniture positioned *just so*, and hoarding old newspapers and other junk till every room is filled with clutter, can all arise out of compulsive drives to relieve obsessive anxieties.

Sufferers of OCD can develop elaborate rituals in increasingly desperate efforts to find peace of mind. James' obsession with his 'lucky' number four meant every action from getting out of bed had to be performed four times, making it almost impossible to leave the house. The ritual intensified till if James was interrupted in a task before getting to four, he felt he had to start all over again.

This was no eccentric fad. Like many OCD sufferers, James believed if he did not complete these fourfold actions, something dreadful would happen to him. But he resented the palaver he had to go through to ease his anxiety, and felt trapped in a senseless set of actions that spoiled his life.

It is hard for onlookers to understand the depth of these compulsions. Parents of children with OCD can be judged as too lax. They are more probably struggling to handle their child's distress if

that compulsive demand—say, for the endless re-washing of clothes—is not met.

Imp of the perverse

Even those who are strongly religious are not immune from OCD, usually described in a religious context as 'scrupulosity.'

John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress* testified to being affected by what some have called the 'Imp of the Perverse,' experiencing almost overwhelming intrusive thoughts he would suddenly shout out blasphemies in the middle of a service of worship. He writes 'I could not tell how to speak my words for fear I should misplace them,' terrified that 'some horrible blasphemous thought or other would bolt out of my heart.'

Specific religious obsessions and compulsions may vary: an Orthodox Jew might worry he did not perform a particular ritual correctly; a Roman Catholic might go to confession several times a day. Some, like Jackie, become terrified they have committed a sin, forgotten it, and then neglected to repent of it. Jackie would spend hours in church, confessing to her pastor and trying to convince him some thought or feeling she had was leading her straight to hell. She responded to every altar call, asking to be led in the prayer of salvation again and again, and becoming so paralysed with doubt, she was almost afraid to do or say anything at all.

No clear answers

But how does OCD begin? There are no clear-cut answers. One possible explanation is biological, as using anti-depressant drugs that regulate serotonin levels appears to lower the behavioural symptoms of OCD. Thus some conclude that OCD is caused by a hormonal imbalance in the sufferer's brain that has made it prone to getting locked unhealthily on to a sense of fear and danger.

n—the pain of OCD

Other approaches suggest the sufferer has 'learnt' to dread certain harmless situations through association with a past painful experience. Because the particular behaviour turned to in response did help alleviate discomfort, this behaviour is then applied even when it has no logical connection with the present stress.

There is some evidence a traumatic event can trigger OCD. For example, a young woman sexually assaulted on holiday found herself repeatedly washing herself and discarding the things she had with her as a result. Once back home, this developed into compulsive rituals of cleaning and washing.

But more often, sufferers struggle to pinpoint a particular event. They report a general backdrop of stress and stressful events—combinations of overwork, childbirth, illness or bereavement, marriage problems—alongside a more gradual onset of the disorder. It makes sense. After all, many of us would identify with behaving a bit more 'compulsively' under stress. When your mind is distracted with anxieties, it's easy to lose track of whether you've remembered to bring the shopping list or lock your car door, and to get caught up in double-checking everything.

Whilst OCD's origins remain elusive, there is more agreement about the effective way to treat it. It's estimated that 60–80 per

cent of sufferers respond positively to cognitive behavioural therapy, supported in some cases with anti-depressant medication. This therapy addresses clients' thoughts and beliefs (their 'cognitions'); to help them think differently, and unlearn the assumptions and anxieties they have built up.

Two-fold task

In practical terms OCD clients face the two-fold task of 'exposure' and 'prevention': being exposed to the anxiety-provoking triggers they are avoiding, and then prevented from using the habitual behaviour they would use to relieve that anxiety. With the therapist's help, OCD clients list the triggers they would find difficult to tolerate in ascending order of difficulty. Then they work their way up the ladder, learning to deal with them step by step, via manageable targets.

A manageable target might involve tolerating anxious feelings that bit longer, without rushing to get rid of them. OCD sufferers often underestimate their ability to do this, and are surprised to find anxiety levels subsiding as they hold their ground.

Cognitive behavioural therapists may also challenge their client's ability to tolerate anxiety more actively, for example, tackling fear of contamination from dog hair by rubbing a cloth across a dog's back and then getting the client to touch it. Or they may 'model' a different way of doing things, such as the therapist who showed a client obsessive about cleaning her teeth how she could do this effectively without the ritual of having to brush each tooth individually and in a set order.

Such compulsive behaviour in the bathroom clearly interferes with ordinary living, and needs therapeutic intervention to help the client modify it. But when it comes to religious scrupulosity, it may be harder for a disorder to be recognised, as obsessions and compulsions have become intertwined in the person's religious



observances. After all, rituals are a part of corporate worship: Jesus himself instituted one when he broke bread at the Last Supper and instructed: 'Do this in remembrance of me.' Rituals can create a sense of continuity and rhythm, reminding us of important truths as we enact them together.

However, the person caught up in an obsessive-compulsive problem tends to have an excessive and narrow focus on a few rules or one particular concern about sin that overrides everything else. They may well overlook the bigger picture of their faith as they relate to those around them.

But whether their OCD is centred around their church home life, it can be very difficult for Christians to come to terms with the fact that they feel out of control, and need further help than a kindly prayer and encouragement to have more faith.

Coming to terms

Professional treatment and pastoral support can of course go hand in hand. Helen, a gentle Christian woman struggling with long-entrenched OCD, said, "I've come to terms with having this problem, but I do need re-assurance that I'm not such a wicked person as I think I am."

Perhaps the greatest gift a Christian can offer anyone in the throes of OCD is compassionate acceptance. According to one Christian counsellor, 'Often the only difference with Christians who suffer an anxiety disorder is they feel more guilty and anxious about it. There's a great deal of shame attached to having OCD—sufferers are well aware their behaviour looks outlandish. And Christians get particularly "anxious about being anxious." They feel they "ought" to be able to overcome it. But we need to give each other permission to be human.'

From threats of terrorism to environmental pollution; from the insecurity of our pensions to disorder on our streets; from getting promoted to giving birth, to live in this world is

to taste anxiety even as we hunger for peace.

Jesus lovingly reckoned with this reality, many times encouraging the anxious to move beyond their fears by trusting in Him, the one who has overcome the world, and offers a peace no worldly attainment or compulsive behaviour can achieve.



Whilst few of us will experience OCD, perhaps all of us fit somewhere on that continuum of anxiety that runs between compulsion and contentment. And at times of stress, we may find ourselves moving further up the scale.

Being honest about where we are on the anxiety spectrum is our first step in moving into the more abundant life that Jesus offers. We can have the courage to do this without shame. For 'In Christ there is no condemnation'.

Talking with others, listening in our prayers and being attentive to our inner world—even that of our dreams can help us pinpoint the roots of our anxiety. Has an illness in the family triggered a pre-occupation with health? An accident inflamed our sense of risk? A failure cast a shadow over trying again? Understanding its cause can help address its cure.

Renewing the mind

Our beliefs and assumptions may need to be addressed. Perhaps St Paul himself can be seen as an originator of the Cognitive-Behavioural approach when he urged Christians in Rome to 'be transformed by the renewing of your mind,' and exhorted the fearful Timothy, 'continue in what you have learned,' rather than allowing fear to rule.

There is even Biblical precedent for tackling our anxiety in stages: the children of Israel did not conquer the Promised Land all at once. It would have been too much for them. They were to gain territory little by little, so they could hold the ground they had taken.

We too may find worry transformed to trust one step at a time. Can we risk checking the door's locked just one time less? Can we tolerate a particular anxiety with Jesus, rather than panic and run away or rush into our own solutions? It may be our anxious feelings will lag behind our decision to stand firm. Can we hang on in there and live through that dis-ease till our anxieties subside and peace emerges?

We may not need professional intervention, just loving understanding, as we seek God's help in dealing with the anxious thoughts that come upon us. But it may simply be a matter of degree. When we encounter those who are struggling with OCD, it helps to remember that we are made of the same stuff. □

Are you caught in the Activity Trap?

I HAD A FRIEND who was a person of many talents. I admired his intelligence and ability to find a solution to any problem. He had a very active mind placed in an even more active body. To get his attention you had to have something interesting to tell him, and you had better express it in the first five seconds. Any longer and you were more likely than not to lose him.

My friend left a very good job to go into business for himself. He never paused to ponder the wisdom of his decision. He was constantly on the move, going places, meeting people and doing the things that busy businessmen do. Things went well at first, but then he faced some setbacks and landed in debt. He had become so entrapped in activity that he failed to take the time to re-access his priorities or direction or progress, or to listen to advice from his peers or those experienced in his field. He was still busy—much too busy. But now his activity switched from rushing about making money to going from one creditor after another trying to reassure them.

This can happen to any of us. Not perhaps on such a disastrous scale as my poor friend but we can all become too busy.

What can we do about it?

Every now and again during the course of a busy day, we should pause to reflect. We may simply review the day's happenings. We may pause over a misunderstanding, a hurtful remark, a conflict at work or just take a respite from the crowded thoughts that fill our minds during the day. It is important for both our health and sanity to set some time aside for reflection—A time when we take stock of events and ponder over some of our actions. A time when we examine our real motivations and draw up the

balance sheet for the day.

The 21st century person is used to high-pressure living. This style of life takes its toll, in blood pressure, heart attacks and many other manifestations of ill health and anxiety. While many realise the folly of their ways and go in search of spiritual solutions to their harried existence, others simply set aside some time in the day for reflection.

There may be a time for impulsive and spontaneous actions. However, the more we reflect the more chances we have to see things from more than one perspective. This process enriches our lives. The process of reflection



enables us to become our own teachers in life. As Socrates said, "The un-reflected life is not worth living." We need to set a certain time aside in the day to reflect, to count our blessings and to give others and ourselves positive messages. When we reflect, we have time to correct our faults, balance out our emotions and change direction.

The eastern religions have always strongly emphasized the value of solitude, silence, meditation, reflection, asceticism and the inner quest. Even atheists recognise the value of this process. But Christianity, at least as we experience it today, gives the impression of being a 'busy'

by
Joe D'Costa

religion. This is not what the founder of Christianity taught. Jesus Christ made time in His activity packed life of teaching, helping and healing people to find a secluded spot to pray and meditate.

In his best-selling book 'The Purpose Driven Life', Rick Warren points out: "When you think about a problem over and over in your mind, that's called worry. When you think about God's Word over and over in your mind, that's meditation. If you know how to worry you already know how to meditate. You just need to switch your attention from your problems to Bible verses. The more you meditate on God's Word, the less you will have to worry about."¹ I wish my oh-so-busy friend had understood that.

If we want to achieve spiritual heights, we need to take time off to stay with ourselves, to reacquire ourselves with our inner selves. This time of reflection is not only a mental safety valve, but it enriches our existence with dimensions that only reveal themselves in times of silence.

A time of reflection is a time to building our faith and learning to be comfortable with ourselves. Just as we plan our business and our daily lives, so we must plan and build for

our spiritual lives. For we human beings, life is not just about the here and now. We need to invest not just financially, but emotionally and spiritually in the future.

By our thoughts and actions, we leave impressions in the sands of time, impressions that affect (are carried forward by) our children and all who come in contact with us. We can convey positive or negative impressions based on our mental, emotional and spiritual state of mind.

Can we learn to re-align our lives by rescheduling our times to accommodate time for quiet reflection? It could make the difference between true success and failure. □

¹ *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren, Zondervan, 2002

What happens when

THE OTHER DAY my ears pricked up when a local Chinese television channel featured a documentary report on an unusual story of adoption. A single middle-aged woman in China adopted three old ladies in her village as her 'mothers'.

Her heart went out to these adopted mothers because they had no family to look after them and no other means of self-support. One of the old ladies had severe physical disabilities. The others had the usual old-age health problems. All three had their own idiosyncrasies.

Their very dutiful new daughter is not rich. She has to work extra hard to earn enough to keep the four of them alive. Unfortunately, owing to stress and being overworked perhaps, she eventually suffered from an ailment that needed an urgent operation. But where could she find money to pay for the medical expenses? Should she become an invalid, what would then happen to the adopted mothers?

Her problem was solved when the village head came to her rescue. Because of her noble deed and charity in adopting the three old



by
**Yong
Chin Gee**

that this kind lady resents her natural mother, who gave her away for adoption when she was a child. Her natural mother is now an old widow living a lonely life by herself in another part of town. The daughter refuses to relate to her because she gave her away as an adoptee.

Which just goes to show—well, what exactly? Perhaps that adoption can be a very complicated procedure, producing a whole range of often conflicting emotions.

Adoption trauma

You would think that an adopted child would feel only gratitude. But the reality is that they experience trauma, upset, hurt, grief, sorrow, anger, hate, resentment and even bitterness. They can grow up feeling unaccepted, rejected, abandoned, forsaken, not pitied, uncared for, and unloved.

Yes, even when welcomed into a loving family, some gnawing questions won't go away. Why were their biological parents so heartless, cruel and unloving to give them away for adoption?

So the ostensibly positive idea of adoption can often bring up feelings of rejection, abandonment and being 'second class' family members. And that can get in the way when we read things like this in the Bible: "Long, long ago He [God] decided to adopt us into His family through Jesus Christ."¹ (What pleasure He took in planning this!). When St. Paul wrote that, about 2000 years ago, he could not have known that it would one day be read by Asian people, who had a rather different view of adoption than he did. He was thinking of adoption customs as practiced in the world he knew. To really understand what he was trying to explain, we need to know the difference. Otherwise, our Chinese customs could get in the way of really grasping a wonderful Biblical truth.



Ancient Chinese traditions on adoption

Ancient Chinese culture emphasized the importance of every family to have descendents. Mencius, a noted philosopher, said, "There are three things which are

When a child is born constitutionally weak some parents believe the soul is only loosely attached and can be easily frightened out of the body by malicious spirits or demons. It is reported that some parents in Taiwan bring their small child suffering from ill health to a big tree and ask it to adopt their child. A red silk thread is tied on to the trunk or branch, and the tree is regarded as the nominal parent of the child. Some people in a certain community in Taiwan believe that when the child grows up healthily, the tree will gradually die.

mothers, it was recognised that she was doing a great service to the local community. Therefore, the village administrator showed 'honour' to her by granting her a free operation in the hospital, plus free medical care afterwards.

The story, however, is a bit more complicated than this. It turns out

When God adopts you?



culture advocate the adoption of son rather than daughter? The answer lies mainly on the teachings of filial piety, the gender role, and the belief in ancestral worship.

It is a sad fact of history that parents gave away their children because of gender discrimination, based on cultural prejudices or superstitions. Chinese parents of the older generation in Malaysia gave their baby daughters away when born, sometimes even to Malay families who would gladly adopt them.

In ancient China, when a couple had no child after a few years of marriage, they would adopt one to bring good luck, fortune, or blessings to the family so that subsequently natural children will be born thereafter. A childless couple would want to adopt a male as a son in preference for a female as a daughter. Adoption was considered ideal if the adoptee was from the children of brothers, sisters, close of kin or relatives.

It was acceptable to adopt a child from people of the same village and town, or of same dialect or ethnic background.

The ancient political, economic and cultural preference for baby boys was still going strong when China introduced a one-child policy in 1980s. According to the national census statistics in 2000, for every 100 girls born in China, about 16 more new-born boys came into the world; in other countries usually only five to seven more boys are born. The traditional Chinese thinking that men are more valuable than women still prevails in some parts of China. Some rural folk just abandoned and dumped female infants outside orphanages. It is reported that 99 per cent of Chinese children adopted by foreigners are girls.

The need for a son

The tradition of filial piety in ancient China explains why a son occupies such an important role and status in the family.

First and foremost, a family with no son cannot perpetuate the family line and surname. Second, the son, not a daughter, carries the responsibility of performing the religious rites and rituals in a funeral service of deceased parents. Without a son in the family, aging parents are afraid of becoming the “hungry ghosts or wandering spirits” in the nether world after death, since there is no male heir or descendants to offer the sacrifices of food, or symbolic paper money, houses and cars for their need after death. And that is unthinkable.

Among the traditional societies in China, including Taiwan and South-East Asia countries, some parents let their small children to be adopted by temple gods or goddesses who become their nominal parents. These deities are regarded as protector and guardians of children's fortune and welfare. The relationship lasts until they reach adulthood. Then the adopted child will go to the nominal parent's temple and thank the deity for the protection. That ends the nominal adoption.

Not just for the after life

To the traditional Chinese family, adopting a son is not only important when you are dead, but also when you are alive. There is at least a hope if the adopted son is decently brought up that he will practise filial piety that inculcates the moral virtue of honouring parents. A son, generally speaking, can be trusted, be relied on and depended upon to provide some means of support or social security in times of adversities, sickness or old age. Whereas, a daughter, adopted or not, when married owes her duties and obligations principally or solely to her husband and his family. Parents normally don't expect a married daughter to devote her care, concern and service to them once married off to a traditional home.

A son after marriage is still a son, taught to be filial to parents and be loyal to the family line. A daughter, however, once married belongs to

unfilial, and having no progeny is the worst of these.”

Therefore, the traditional society would not look at a childless couple kindly if they didn't adopt a progeny, especially a son!

Why does traditional Chinese



another family, which is counted as a “virtual loss” to the biological parents. Living in such a cultural milieu and tradition-bound society, we can understand why a childless couple would naturally adopt a son rather than a daughter.

In ancient China, the common traditional practice of parents was to bequeath their landed properties to their sons, not daughters. What about the rights of an adopted son?

An adopted son could not claim legal rights of equal distribution of inheritance with other natural-born sons in the ancient court of law and justice. In fact, in most cases the distribution of inheritance would have been settled before the father died. How much an adopted

son inherits would depend on the parental desires, wishes and judgment. It also depended somehow on the character of the adopted son, whether he exhibited or expressed filial piety in his mannerisms, behaviour or conduct towards the parents in their lifetime.

These examples explain why an adopted child could grow up feeling like an unwanted ‘second best’ substitute for the real thing. The adopted child could never really feel like he or she was a full member of the family. But that was not what St. Paul had in mind when he wrote about God adopting sons (and daughters) into His family.

Greco-Roman culture of adoption

In the Greco-Roman culture of St. Paul’s day, adoption was common, particularly among the upper class of Roman citizens. It was often used to gain political and/or economic advantage. Several Roman emperors, for example, adopted men who were not blood relatives for the purpose of conferring on them certain privileges and authority.

The law of adoption spelt out its basic premise that a father had almost absolute legal authority over his child. That authority extended to the power of life and death, no matter what the child’s age was. Thus, a child, in the eyes of the law, was the possession of the

We really are God's children!

The Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero, sheds some light on how adoption was practised throughout the Empire. Addressing members of the Pontifical College, Cicero asks: "What, gentlemen, is the law relating to adoption? Clearly that the adoption of children should be permissible to those who are no longer capable of begetting children" (De Dome Sua XII, 34).

Like responsible agencies today, the Roman authorities took adoption very seriously. According to Cicero, the priests carried out extensive inquiries into the reasons, motives and suitability of each adoption case. If they approved, the Senate had to pass an appropriate bill granting the adoption (XIII-XIV).

When we study the ancient Roman adoption process in more detail, we can identify seven lessons from Paul's metaphor that helped the Christians of his day to live up to their new status as "Members of the Family of God"—lessons that will enable us to do the same!

1. God the Father has fully paid for our family membership

It was an indispensable requirement of Roman law for the person being adopted to be bought or redeemed from natural parents or the closest family relative. Only then did the magistrates assign the adopted person to the new father. This requirement was later abolished by Justinian (Codex viii, 47, 10; Inst. I, ii, 2). But it was an essential part of Roman life when Paul wrote his epistle. The spiritual parallel is clear: Christians are "bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20) and "are justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that came through Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24), "to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:5).

2. Family members receive God's love and blessings

Initially, Roman adoption helped to maintain the family name and to perpetuate the sacred rites (Cicero, De Legibus 11, 19). It was later used as a means for qualifying for certain state benefits, and even for satisfying personal needs and feelings of affection.

This practice has an immediate appeal in the Christian context: We join God's family (Ephesians 3:15); have access to His blessings (Romans 15: 27); and accept His love (John 3:16).

3. All family members belong to God

Under Roman law, the person being adopted had publicly to renounce all previous family connections, political affiliations, and religious allegiances. In addition, he was to transfer his property and future acquisitions to his new parents. This aspect of Roman adoption procedure reminds us of a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith: Believers "are among those called to belong to Jesus Christ...So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Romans 1:6; 14:8).

4. All family members start over with a clean slate

The Roman authorities required the new parents to assume all the debts of their adopted son or daughter, freeing them from all financial obligations.

For the Christian, this points to the removal of sin. Through Jesus Christ, our spiritual slate is left perfectly clean so that we can embark on a new life, without the burden of the past: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

5. Family members take their Father's name

In Roman society, the adopted person, irrespective of age and rank, took the name of his new Father. No authority could minimise or ignore this change.

In spiritual terms, Christians now have the family name: "Children of God"! (1 John 3:1). They also receive the same Spirit of their new Father and call Him by that intimate title (Romans 8:15). They are subject to God in everything: in inheritance (Romans 8:16-18), in chastisement (Hebrews 12:5-11) and in every other way—as the fully invested sons and daughters that they are.

6. Family membership is permanent

Adoption into a Roman family meant total dependence on a new Father in a relationship that would last as long as the Father lived.

Christians should understand from this that, since God is eternal, our place in God's household is forever!

As Paul told the church at Rome: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

7. Adopted sons and daughters are considered real children, not stepchildren, of God

The result of Roman adoption was so final, and the change so real, that the adopted individual was treated as if he had been a natural child.

Paul's teaching on spiritual adoption is definitive: the individual who was not previously a member of God's household, is now God's actual son and genuine heir—with a status no different from that conferred at birth.

At the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, the Christians there were at odds with one another over who was the genuine article: a converted law-keeping Jew, or a Gentile who had come from a pagan background.

Paul wanted Gentile Christians to know that they were not second-class members in the household of faith.

They should not think of themselves as temporary replacements until the real children (of Israel) returned to God.

Far from it! God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to free not just one nation, but the whole world from sin.

Paul devotes much of the book of Romans addressing this issue.

These seven lessons illustrate that the Roman practice of adoption provided Paul with a rich metaphor, which he uses to convey a marvellous truth of scripture: We really are God's children!

By Jim Herst



father, and under his absolute power. Therefore, adoption was a serious legal transaction.

In adoption, the absolute power and authority of the birth father had to be transferred to the adoptive father before the magistrate. The point was, *Roman adoption conferred on the adopted son all the rights and*

privileges of a natural-born son.

Some Romans adopted their slaves, thus conferring upon them the privileges of sonship, including the legal rights of inheritance. To adopt a slave involved paying a ransom, covering all the debts the slave ever incurred. The conferring of sonship to a slave in the Roman

world could be a solemn, lengthy and costly affair. However, once completed, there was no question of the adoptee being second class, or a substitute. He or she was the real thing, with every right to be considered a genuine part of the family.

That is what St. Paul was saying happened when God adopted children into His family.

When God adopts

It is hard for us to understand how much God loves the human race. He considers us all to be His potential children, and He wants us to be with Him, as one great happy family, for ever. He is continually seeking to adopt human beings to be His spiritual children in His kingdom. That was the very purpose why the “Word of God” was incarnated as Jesus Christ. His mission was to call people to become the adopted children of God.

St. Paul often used the metaphor of “adoption” of sons or children by God in his many epistles to portray the spiritual reality, status and intimate relationship between God and Christians. People familiar with Roman adoption customs would have understood exactly what he meant.

Paul also described a Christian before conversion as “a slave of sin.” As we saw, in Greco-Roman culture, to adopt a slave involved the full payment of a ransom. God, in order to adopt us as His child has to pay a ransom as well to set us free from being “a slave to sin.” Unless and until God adopts us, we are merely spiritually hopeless, comfortless, insecure, forlorn, miserable, God-forsaken creatures existing into death and oblivion. We aren’t even ‘hungry ghosts’.

Jesus Christ willingly paid the ransom price with His life on the cross—the price of redemption and salvation for all mankind. What a costly price for God to pay to adopt human beings to be His spiritual children! But it shows,



perhaps as nothing else could, that He really wants us.

When God adopts us as His children we, just like the Roman adoption, receive all the rights, privileges and inheritance as a natural-born son or daughter. All adopted children in the family or Kingdom of God will enjoy full status, without any bias, prejudices or discrimination.

Paul explained in his letter to the Galatians; “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”² All adopted children of God will be equally treasured in His Family or Kingdom.

Paul also wrote an important message to the Christians in Rome concerning our status as full family members:

“This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It’s adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike “What’s next, Papa?” God’s Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who He is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what’s coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance!

¹ Ephesians 1:5 (Message Bible)

² Galatians 3:28

³ Romans 8:15–17 (Message Bible)

We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with Him, then we’re certainly going to go through the good times with him!”³ Paul understood God’s adoption as having past, present and future implications.

Christians are already God’s adopted children, but the full meaning of all that won’t be seen until the future.

In the resurrection, which is the hope of all Christians, the adoption will be complete in the “glorification or the redemption of our bodies.” We will be changed from a weak, mortal human body of flesh and blood to become a powerful, immortal, spiritual body, like Jesus Christ after His resurrection.

That is the ultimate reality and destiny of the ‘adoption’ process of salvation. God’s adopted children are not stand-ins for the real thing,

or temporary substitutes until He can get what He really wants. They are personally and individually chosen, their debts are paid off, and they are welcomed, now and forever, into His family.

Being adopted as spiritual children of God, we become co-heirs with Christ, sharing all the inheritance of the riches and glory of God’s creation in the cosmos, universe and the heavens. As adopted resurrected spiritual children of God, we will dwell in eternal security of

unity, peace, harmony, love and righteousness, where human pain, sorrow, sufferings and death will be a thing of the past.

This is the good news of the message of Christ. The only question you have to answer is “Am I ready and willing to accept God’s wonderful, free and loving offer of adoption through His Son, Jesus Christ, and joyfully calling God my Heavenly Father?” □

Even a big rock can be chosen as a nominal parent, to protect a weak or sickly child from bad luck or misfortune. The Tree god or Stone must be worshipped with offerings of incense, spirit money and food regularly as protectors and guardians of the adopted children.

eternal security of

unity, peace, harmony, love and righteousness, where human pain, sorrow, sufferings and death will be a thing of the past.

This is the good news of the message of Christ. The only question you have to answer is “Am I ready and willing to accept God’s wonderful, free and loving offer of adoption through His Son, Jesus Christ, and joyfully calling God my Heavenly Father?” □

Yeah, yeah—answered prayer?

*B*renda was afraid of heights but decided to give it a try. Half way up an almost vertical cliff, she lost her contact lens. With blurry sight, her friends helped her make it to the top. With a breathtaking view of mountain ranges around her, a Bible verse came to mind, “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth.” She thought, “Lord, You can see all these mountains. You know every single stone and leaf. You know exactly where my contact lens is.”

Later they walked back down a beaten path to the bottom and met a new group of rock climbers. Then one of them who had started climbing shouted, asking if anyone had lost a contact lens! Yes, Brenda’s. How was it found? Moving slowly across the rock face, an ant was carrying that contact lens on its back, possibly with a glint of the sun on it, to loudly advertise the value of its burden!

Well, was it luck or mere coincidence? Is there a God who actually cares enough to return a contact lens to us? For those who do not know the Christian God this could well be dismissed as a stroke of luck, or just an incredible coincidence. That’s all there is to it. End of story.

But why should we discount the involvement of an all-knowing God, who loves and cares dearly for all that He had created, and who is able to answer prayers? A God who can orchestrate situations so as to bring about the most good and benefit to the object of His love?

Was finding Brenda’s contact lens of the most benefit for Brenda? Yes and no. In terms of actual value a contact lens is not a big deal. Brenda could well afford a new one. But having her silent plea favourably answered (and in such a dramatic way) did wonders for her faith, don’t you think?

Wait, there’s more

Unmistakably, Brenda experienced a powerful sense of attentive love. Because God took pains to show He attended to her small, insignificant, non urgent, non life-threatening

request, how much more assured Brenda is now going to be when she comes to Him with big issues in her life. This dramatic display only served to hint of His abundant love He has for His loved ones. Brenda didn’t remember all the words of the scripture. It would have been even more heartening for her if she had thought of the rest: “For the eyes of the LORD ranged throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him...”¹



by
**Mak
Chew Yeng**

If God knows and cares so tenderly for Brenda, would He not be the same towards you and me? He has declared He doesn’t play favourites. When God says He knows us,² this “knowing” means the most intimate knowing possible. This encompasses every good, bad and ugly side of what makes up who we are—our strengths, weaknesses, proclivities, sensitivities and even quirks.

He knows what we can accomplish when we tap into the



This miraculous intervention had also reminded and reassured Brenda that God is all-knowing. Now that particular scripture has become a solid bulwark for this aspect of God’s character. God knows Brenda would be greatly encouraged when He answered her ‘S.O.S.’ this way. He knows your dilemma. Are you concerned with the direction of life your children are heading? Do you worry about the state of your marriage or your status of being single? For all these anxieties, God surely knows.

gifts and talents that He has given us. He knows how we act when provoked. He knows what we feel when insensitive and hurtful remarks cut in deeply. Sometimes when improper and lustful thoughts flip across our minds, whether we reject or entertain them, He knows it too.

All He wants us to do is, like Brenda, bring our hopes and concerns to Him and trust Him to use it to work for best good. Yes, God knows you and He cares deeply for you. □

¹ 2 Chronicles 16:9

² John 10:14

There was a castaway stranded on a desert island for five years.

After his rescue one of the men who found him noticed three huts lined up in a row and asked him about them.

Pointing to the first hut the castaway said, "That's my house." Pointing to the second hut he said, "That's my church."

Then the rescuer pointed to the third hut and asked about it. "Oh," said the castaway, "that's the church I used to go to."

"Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."
St. Francis of Assisi

An era can be said to end when its basic illusions are exhausted.
Arthur Miller

In all institutions where the brisk air of public criticism fails to circulate, an innocent corruption grows up, like a mushroom.
Frederick Nietzsche

Lord, give me what you have made me want; I praise and thank you for the desire that you have inspired. Perfect what you have begun, and grant me what you have made me long for.
Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)

There has never been any shortage of people who will tell us that the evidence is totally persuasive, and that—unless we are complete fools—we will accept that there is no meaning in life, and no God behind this world. Some argue that atheism is the only logically and scientifically

respectable worldview. Yet this overlooks the inconvenient fact that truth claims of atheism simply cannot be proved. How do we know there is no God? The simple fact of the matter is that atheism is a faith, which draws conclusions that go beyond the available evidence.
Alister McGrath

To my mind, mixing Church and State is like putting ice-cream together with horse manure—it doesn't do any harm to the horse manure—but it ruins the ice-cream.
Tony Campalo

'When you think about a problem over and over in your mind, that's called worry. When you think about God's Word over and over in your mind, that's meditation. If you know how to worry you already know how to meditate. You just need to switch your attention from your problems to Bible verses. The more you meditate on God's Word, the less you will have to worry about'.

In *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren.

"A great deal of talent is lost to the world for want of a little courage. Every day sends to their graves obscure men whose timidity prevented them from making a first effort."
Sydney Smith (1771-1845) English Clergyman & Writer

You may feel that the only time God is pleased with you is when you are doing "spiritual" activities—like reading the Bible, attending church, praying or sharing your faith. And you may think God is unconcerned about other parts of your life. Actually God enjoys watching every detail of your life, whether you are working, playing or resting. He doesn't miss a single move you make.
Rick Warren

Never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light.
V. Raymond Edman



The cost of raising a medium-size dog to the age of eleven: 6,400 UK pounds

Men can read smaller print than women can; women can hear better.

The first couple to be shown in bed together on prime time TV were Fred and Wilma Flintstone.

In old England, when customers got unruly, the bartender would yell at them mind their own pints and quarts and settle down. It's where we get the phrase "mind your P's and Q's"

If you want to truly understand something, try to change it
Kurt Lewin

"It is never too late to be what you might have been."
George Eliot

Did you ever notice that when you blow in a dog's face, he gets mad at you, but when you take him for a car ride; he sticks his head out of the window?

You just received a double blessing in that someone was thinking of you, and furthermore, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world who cannot read at all.



It is calculated that if all the adults in England and Wales turned the tap off while cleaning their teeth, it would save 180 million litres of water a day.

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.

The Loss

A Story About

Dear Diary,

Today I received a call from mum. Daddy has cancer. I'm at a loss for words. All the haunting memories of the past return to me in a flash. I don't know what to do....

Dear Diary,

I went back to our hometown in Johor today. I went straight to daddy's office. There he was behind the desk. He looked strange. Pale and thin. I couldn't recognise him. He smiled at me and said, "Thank you for coming, sweetheart."

"Of course I'd come" I said.

"So you've heard I got this cancer thing. I wanted to tell you myself but as usual your mother has to go and tell even though I specifically told her that I wanted to break the news."

Accusations again. Will it ever end? Then he cries. I cry. I wanted to hug him but I still hate him. He hugs me and I hug him back awkwardly. Then he starts complaining about mum saying that all she's talking about is God. He asks me to do him a favour.

"Advise her to please stop all the 'God' talk."

Dear Diary,

Mum is so stubborn! She won't even do a simple thing like stop talking about God in front of daddy! He's already sick, and she'll drive him to his grave with all that religious talk sooner or later. The truth is, even I'm fed up with her big hullabaloo about Jesus and His crap!

Dear Diary,

Today, My boss told me that I have been granted to work two to three days a week. I'm really grateful to have such a compassionate manager. Now I can spend the rest of the time helping mum take care of daddy.

Daddy's chemotherapy has also begun. He is in a lot of pain but still wills himself to do the gardening and other stuff around the house. Daddy loved nature. He used to take us fishing and jungle trekking when I was younger. Maybe we could go fishing when daddy is better.

Dear Diary,

I've been thinking about the past a lot lately. Daddy hitting mum. The constant yelling and shouting between them. The family meetings daddy holds after each drinking session. His breath smelling from alcohol, he would sit us all down at the dining table and make horrible accusations of mum committing adultery. I hate him!

I'm thinking of calling a family meeting....

Dear Diary,

I held that family meeting. I sat the family down and started with mum. I told her I was fed up with being judged in everything. Nothing I did was ever good enough. And I did not need to have her constantly reminding me of God.

But my main concern was daddy. I told him straight in his face, "Daddy, although I may not be 'religious' like mum, I do believe that there truly is a heaven and a hell. And I believe that no man who treats his wife the way you treated mum deserves to go to heaven. I love you, but I hated you for all those horrible things you did to mum."

I was in tears the whole time.

"I really want to be able to see you again one day in heaven, daddy. So please, don't die until you've apologised to mummy for all that you've done to her!"

After all that, Daddy gave me a hug. I never imagined having such a talk and it

by
Alaric Tay

*t Diary**

Finding Jesus

drained me. Daddy said he was very proud of me. That it took tons of courage to stand up and confront my unhappiness. He said that at least it made me feel better. It did.

Dear Diary,

I feel horrible! That night after the family meeting, daddy went to bed and from that moment onwards, he gave up on life. He never got out of bed again. He stopped eating solid food and his condition deteriorated severely. Words cannot describe the guilt that has come upon me as a result of my 'family talk'.

Dear Diary,

Daddy's condition has worsened. He is even afraid to sleep at night. Mummy stays by his side every night, praying, comforting and singing hymns to him. I fear the worst.

Dear Diary,

Mum told me today that daddy had called her to his bedside and apologised to her for all that he had done to her in the past. Forgiveness took place between them. It was an emotional moment for me. I knew daddy had been touched and is somehow changed.

Dear Diary,

Pastor Phillip came to visit daddy today. Daddy is now at a stage where he is unconscious most of the time, but when mum asked him if he wanted to accept Jesus as his Lord and Saviour. To my astonishment, he said, "Yes, oh yes!"

...Daddy was smiling at me, and holding my hand gently when he passed away.

Dear Diary,

In a few days time, it will be one year since daddy left us. Daddy's acceptance of God has had an impact on me. I have come to know this God as the same God that gave mum the strength to stand alone throughout her life with daddy. That's right, alone. Everyone, including me, her own child, thought she was crazy with all that God talk. But it was God in her that made her faithfully stay and look after him till the very end.

Since then, mum dedicates her time with cancer patients. Holding their hands, praying for them and comforting them.

I, on the other hand, have accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and Saviour. I've quit my corporate job and now work with abused children in a home that is run by our church.

My life has changed, and I feel very blessed.

Dear God,

I lost my diary, but I think it's all right. I have found many things through life's experiences. The pain and suffering I've seen and endured have strengthened me in faith, and the joys in my life have given me hope. But most of all, I have found You. Thank you, Lord, for Your merciful grace. That You would give Jesus, Your only son, to be sacrificed for my sake!

I miss daddy very much, Lord. I wish he were still here. But I know he has gone to a greater place to be by Your side, and I know he is in Your safe hands. After all, there is no greater joy Lord, than being with You.

In Jesus loving name, amen. ❏



"...In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world"
(John 16:33)

***Based on a true life experience**

Exclusive Club... are

RECENTLY I RECEIVED in the mail a slick brochure advertising a new residential development catering to the high-class section of the population. It invited me to buy one of those beautiful houses set amidst lush landscape. Join the exclusive club of those who own a piece of the coveted real estate, the brochure urged. I threw it away since it was unlikely I would ever be able to rent, let alone buy, such property.

You have probably experienced many such similar examples. Unsolicited offers in the mailbox, or “spam” via e-mail and the internet, are an inescapable fact of life today. In our consumer-oriented society we are constantly bombarded with advertisements for products and services, whether or not we can afford or even need them.

If we carefully examine the advertisements, we notice that certain words keep appearing. We are encouraged to own the “exclusive, unique” products, take advantage of the “limited, rare” offers, sample the “distinctive, special” services, and enjoy the “privileged” status. We can become one of the “select, elite” who have attained that “prestigious, preferred” life that we have always dreamt about or secretly yearned for.

Of course such persuasive words and phrases are not used in these advertisements by accident. They appeal to a very basic human desire of wanting to feel special, distinct from the others or the majority. This longing may manifest in many ways. It could be a wish for fame and recognition, or a drive for excellence and achievement. It could be motivated by competition and one-upmanship or a sense of superiority. Or it may be just an assertion of identity and individuality, or even a compensation for one’s perceived failings.

In a society where “upward mobility” in social class and economic advancement is a sign of success, people strive in those areas so as to be considered special. Others simply join exclusive or

expensive clubs, use certain brands of goods, own certain possessions, live in certain locations, attend (or try to get invited to) certain functions, mix with certain groups, in an attempt to show others or assure themselves that they belong to the select few and the privileged elite. Most of us probably harbour such aspirations. We would love to be included, and better yet, be acknowledged among the exclusive. When we fail



by
**Wong
Mein Kong**

we keep trying, even though disappointment waits for those who struggle and fail.

This desire to be special comes from our very humanity, our self awareness and sense of self worth and creativity. It reflects an innate search for meaning and purpose to our life and existence. Deep down, human beings know that they are truly special and unique, different from other living creatures and the inanimate environment. The Hebrew poet and king, David,

asked of God in awesome wonder, as he looked at the universe and the earth, “What is man that you are mindful of him?”¹ He realised human beings were meant to have a special relationship with the Creator which no other creatures can have. The first human family, Adam and Eve, at first experienced just that. Unfortunately, under the instigation and deception of Satan the devil, they lost trust in God and disobeyed Him. As punishment for their rebellion they were expelled from the Garden of Eden.

Ever since man has generally lived with little knowledge of God and no personal relationship with his Creator. Sin had distorted the human nature and condemned



you a member?

mankind to a spiritually lost state, trying in vain to find direction and purpose to life. There is a hole in his soul that needs to be filled and a void in his heart that yearns to be satisfied. He is destined for a meaningless existence leading to eternal death. Man is totally unable to save himself or the civilisations he has created throughout history.

But God loves His human creation and desires to restore that special relationship with them. To enjoy eternal fellowship with God requires that man have eternal life. So God sent His only Son Jesus Christ to earth as a human being to die on mankind's behalf for their sins.² Thus we can be forgiven and reconciled to our Creator and receive eternal life.³ It was a supreme act of sacrifice from God. On our part, we need to confess our sinfulness deserving of death, repent of our self-centred way of life and accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour.⁴

When we do, there is a remarkable change in our status. We now belong to the most exclusive club, the most distinctive group in the universe. We are adopted as God's children in His

¹ Psalms 8:3–4

² John 3:16, Romans 5:8

³ Romans 5:9–10, Romans 6:23

⁴ Romans 10:9–10

⁵ Romans 8:15–16

⁶ Ephesians 2:6, 19

⁷ 1 Peter 2:4, 9

⁸ 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9

⁹ Matthew 5:14

family, and call our heavenly Father “Abba”.⁵ This is a warm, familiar term that Jesus used to address God. It denotes the unique intimate relationship which is now offered to us as well. We are pictured as seated together with Jesus Christ in heavenly realms, and described as fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.⁶ We are “chosen by God and precious to him” to become “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.”⁷ We are called “saints”, which means set apart, separated, devoted, and consecrated to God for a holy purpose and mission.

Can anything else be more special or privileged or prestigious? Yet this club is not “exclusive” in the snobbish sense. We cannot join on our own, but we are only admitted (by grace) by God, upon our confession that we don't deserve or qualify (in humble repentance) and trusting in Jesus Christ to apply for membership for us (by faith). In fact, this club is the most “inclusive” because it is God's desire that all mankind will accept his invitation to be its members.⁸ But God in His sovereign wisdom

has given mankind the freedom and freewill to accept or reject His offer.

Those of us who have accepted God's gracious work on our behalf are grateful for our special status in God's eyes. That does not give us the right to withdraw behind the walls of an exclusive and privileged community, but to want others to join too. We must be a personal ‘advertising brochure’—or as Jesus puts it: “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.”⁹

One of our responsibilities is to be a witness and share with others the incredible spiritual benefits of being in God's family—not only eternal life and fellowship, but experiencing love, joy, peace, hope, mercy, assurance, guidance, and power to live a life that God really intends for us. Do you want to be included? □

What our readers say:

I look forward to receiving each issue of the PLAIN TRUTH Asia and especially appreciate those articles with a Malaysian Christian flavour. Thank you very much.

C Y Mak
Gombak,
Selangor

After all these years you still remember to send me the magazine. That's simply fantastic! Needless to say, your magazine is most lively and spiritually enlightening. I enclose a nominal



sum that the good work may be carried on.

Albert Ng
Alor Star,
Kedah

Congratulations. This is the only reading material that I attend to when I'm in peace of mind. Every single word is read and pondered upon leisurely. As a token of my appreciation, I would like to donate towards the cost of yearly subscription plus cost for another. Anonymous

It was a great surprise that the Plain Truth magazine has come back to life. I really appreciate your thoughtfulness in mailing me the magazine. The PLAIN TRUTH is a universal teacher of Christian values with no boundaries. As I am already retired about two decades ago without any pension fund and in my twilight zone I enclose a cheque of \$20.00 as a token donation.

Lee Khon Yin
Kuala Lumpur

