



THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Jul-Aug 2011

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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Who are you... really?

If you ask people the question “Who are you?” you will get many different answers such as “I am a housewife...nurse...lawyer...teacher...son/daughter of X...human being.” In a sense, all their answers would be correct. But beyond our profession, family affiliation and species, who are we really?

It will be ironic and indeed sad to live our life without knowing who we really are. We will suffer identity crisis. This article tells us, albeit very briefly, who we are *as God sees us*, not as we see ourselves or others see us. We hope it will clear your identity problem and help you live a more abundant life.

Our previous status

At one time, before we came to know the truth [Christ], we were living like strangers and orphans—without God, without hope, without future.¹ We had no idea who we were or why we were here. We lived aimless lives.

If we had any idea of God, it was a dreadful one. We saw God as an angry, revengeful and judging god, especially if we had disobeyed His commands or messed up our lives. We even had preachers who preached “fire and brimstone” sermons. Sadly, some today still believe and promote these teachings. We would be better off rejecting them and embrace the truth that God reveals to us.

Our new status

Our new status in Christ is: we are a new creation, sons and daughters of God, princes and princesses, royalty, saints, precious jewels. We are also Christ’s fellow brothers and sisters and His beautiful bride. Wow—that’s a handful! Let’s discover our new status a bit more.

We are sons/daughters of God.² We are created in God’s image, we belong to Him, and we live in His life. Knowing this truth should help us see God in a completely new light. God is not a divine judge waiting to punish us whenever we make the slightest mistakes. He loves us immensely. He cares for us and He wants the best for us. He wants us to be filled with love, joy, peace, passion and excitement.

If we truly believe that we are His children, we will live as such. We will not live like orphans or strangers. We will live purposeful, joyful lives.

We are royalty.³ God calls us royal priesthood, princes and princesses. So we should not see ourselves merely as housewives, students, clerks, plumbers, construction workers or maids. We see ourselves as important and valuable people with royal status and

by
**Dr. P.
Sellappan**

privileges.

If we believe we are royalty, we will conduct ourselves accordingly. We will set good examples, we will use our power and influence to do good, we will genuinely care for people. And we will not live in ivory towers, detached from the common people.

We are saints.⁴ God calls us saints. Saints are holy people who do what is right and good and pleasing to God. They are hardworking, faithful, honest, loving and caring. They serve others selflessly and sacrificially. They don’t resort to greed, deceit, hypocrisy, violence and boasting.

We are precious jewels.⁵ God calls us precious jewels—treasures of intrinsic worth and beauty. When we see ourselves as valuable treasures, we will develop our talents and abilities and use them for the good of others.

We have God’s glory.⁶ God gives us His glory. He gives us respect, dignity, honour and praise. He sees us as worthy and useful. If we believe we are created for glory, we will also give honour, respect and praise

to others—parents, children, relatives, friends, colleagues and leaders.

We are bride of Jesus.⁷

As bride, we get to know Jesus, our Bridegroom, more and more and develop an intimate relationship with Him. We trust Him, and we remain faithful, pure and spotless.

If we believe our new status—that we truly are God’s sons and daughters, saints, royalty, precious

jewels, His glory and bride—we will become as such. We will pattern our lives according to our beliefs and we will eventually become what we believe.

Our new reality

God sent His son Jesus to raise our status! He now calls us as His beloved children, royalty, saints, precious jewels and glorious bride. We are no longer the second class nobodies. In Christ, God has made us all first class, special people.

You might ask, “Is it really true? How come nobody told me this?” Satan had deceived and kept us in spiritual darkness.⁸ He had hidden our identity. And we believed his lie and lived beggarly lives. But his time is over.

Jesus has come and set us free. He has raised our status. Believing this truth will radically change our lives. We will experience transformation as never before. Millions are experiencing it. Why not try this new life that God has worked out for you in Christ Jesus? You will be glad you did. □

“...God sent His son Jesus to raise our status! He now calls us as His beloved children, royalty, saints, precious jewels and glorious bride. We are no longer the second class nobodies.”

¹ Ephesians 2–12

² 2 Corinthians 6:18

³ 1 Peter 2:9

⁴ Philippians 4:21–22

⁵ Malachi 3:17

⁶ John 17:22

⁷ Matthew 25:1,10

⁸ 1 John 5:19

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What our readers say:

I like THE PLAIN TRUTH because you make no demands on me!

Liew Geok Heok
Singapore

Ed.: Yes, the PT doesn't make any demands on the readers. We believe in persuading rather than coercing. The PT is offered free of charge for those who want it and there is no obligation to pay for it. Readers subscribe because they like it and they contribute because they want to share it with others. The kingdom of God is about giving and sharing willingly and joyfully. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit share their lives by giving themselves to each other joyfully. That is the kind of life—the Trinitarian life—that God is calling us into. We will be living that kind of life for all eternity, so we may as well start living it now.

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps to deepen my knowledge and understanding of Christianity and humanity.

Jennifer Lim

THE PLAIN TRUTH is teaching me real religion.

Alvino April Rino

Ed.: Religion focuses on rules, rituals and formulas. People believe that following these will lead them to God and receive divine favours and blessings. But real religion is about building relationships with God and with one another. It is about living and sharing life with God and with one another. It is about living in God's abundant life.

THE PLAIN TRUTH is easy to read and understand, and it is practical and relevant.

Jennifer Low
Singapore

I have always enjoyed reading your magazine since I was young. The articles are interesting. May God bless you and I hope you will continue your good work.

Leonard Anselam Gomes
Kuala Lumpur

THE PLAIN TRUTH inspires me to live a more meaningful life. The articles remind us that there is hope for humanity and that God will not abandon us no matter how much we have sinned.

Boey Chee Ho
Penang

All the articles are helpful, thought-provoking and definitely relevant to our daily living. Keep up the wonderful work!

Anthony
Kota Kinabalu

THE PLAIN TRUTH is a very helpful, insightful and interesting magazine to read. I've made a contribution to support your ministry.

Selva Elizabeth
Kuala Lumpur

Enclosed please find my contribution towards the propagation of God's Word.

Raymond Kwong
Singapore

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

Jessie Nathan
Ipoh

THE PLAIN TRUTH strengthens and nourishes my faith. It shows me the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Arthur Francis
Taiping

THE PLAIN TRUTH articles are written in a simple and yet truthful manner. Such a magazine is a gem in today's secular world. When we have finished reading we pass it on to our friends. Thank you for the magazine.

George Menezes
Kuala Lumpur

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps us to understand Jesus' words better!

Peter Dass
Penang

THE PLAIN TRUTH gives new and fresh insights. It is useful for Bible Study Groups and Family Devotions. May God our Lord Jesus Christ continue to bless this magazine.

Michael P J
Kuantan

THE PLAIN TRUTH really enlightens me about the realities of life. I have now become more knowledgeable. All the best to THE PLAIN TRUTH.

Doris Lee
Petaling Jaya

THE PLAIN TRUTH articles in the magazine are good for reflection!

Augustine Wee
Kuala Terengganu

THE PLAIN TRUTH articles are well-written, interesting and relevant to our modern living. I pass the copies to my Church members after reading them. Thank you for sending me the magazine.

Khoo Soo Hock
Taiping

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

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The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space.

Where was God?

If God loves people, why does He wipe them out? We can't help but ask that after a disaster such as the devastating earthquake and tsunami that hit northern Japan. What kind of God would kill so many thousands of people and ruin the lives of millions of others in a single stroke?

Where is God when thousands, tens of thousands, or sometimes hundreds of thousands are being crushed, maimed and trapped in a massive earthquake or drowned when tidal waves swallow coastal towns and cities? If God is all-powerful, surely He could stop such things. So why doesn't He?

Who's to blame?

"God didn't do it; He just allowed it," some say. Maybe they think that's a good defence. I don't, and I doubt you do. Allowing something that you could stop is not much better than doing it yourself.

When something bad happens, we want someone to blame. When the bad thing is a natural disaster, there's no one left to blame but God. Earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, tidal waves, lightning strikes. The insurance companies call them "acts of God". Nobody is to blame—nobody except God, that is.

The Japanese earthquake and tsunami, the recent wildfires and floods in Australia, the earthquakes in Haiti and New Zealand, and the horrific Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 that killed more than 200,000 are just recent examples in a long line of history's mind-numbing natural disasters. Looking back, at least one million died in the North Korean floods and famine of 1995-98. More than 900,000 died in the Ethiopian famine of 1984. Two hundred forty-two thousand died in the Tangshan, China, earthquake of 1976. The Ethiopian famine of 1974 claimed 200,000.

The Bangladesh sea flood of 1970 took 200,000-500,000. China's famine of 1960 took 20 million. One million died in the flu pandemic of 1957, and up to 100 million died in the flu pandemic of 1918. Earthquakes in Nansan, China, in 1927 and in Gansu, China, in 1933 killed 200,000 each. Up to one million died in Huayan Kou, China, in the Yangtze Kiang flooding of 1887.

The French smallpox epidemic in 1870-71 killed 500,000. One million died from the Irish famine of 1845. The Iran earthquake of 1780 killed 200,000. Ten million died in the Bengal, India, famine of 1769. The Shensi, China, earthquake of 1556 claimed 800,000. And the black plague of Europe and Asia in 1346-42 took 25 million lives.

People ask, why does a loving God let such astounding mayhem happen?



by
**Dr. Michael
Fezell**

*"...when someone we love
dies before growing old, we
ask, "Why would God allow
this to happen?"*

I have another question. Why does God let *anyone* die?

Not long ago, I attended the funeral of a woman who was celebrated for her many personal ministries of love. She died of cancer, and her suffering was nothing short of horrible. A friend's teenage daughter died in a fiery car crash on slick winter roads. She was on break from a Christian college, and her suffering and the grief of her parents, relatives and friends was every bit as real as the suffering and grief of any individual who died in a tornado, a tsunami or an earthquake.

Why did God let Grandma die? "She was old," someone might say. "It's the natural way of things. We grow old and die."

Yes, it is the natural way of things. Bodies wear out. Plaque builds up in arteries, and if enough builds up, it cuts off the blood flow and causes strokes or heart attacks. Sometimes cells get mixed up and go crazy, becoming cancer cells and disrupting the tissues and organs around them. Over time bones lose their density and an accidental fall can break a hip. Joints lose

their elasticity. Eyes lose their sharpness.

The ground erodes too, and the earth's crust shifts. Water evaporates. Rain falls. Rivers rise. Winds blow. Even healthy people and young people can get hit by falling rocks or flying debris. People get caught in flash floods, mudslides and collapsed mineshafts.

People fall off roofs, out of windows and off scaffoldings. Sometimes it happens when

they are doing humanitarian work, trying to help or save someone else. And God, far, far more often than not, sits by and watches it happen without lifting a finger to stop it.

When someone we love grows old and dies of "natural causes" we accept it as the way God has designed the creation—there's a time to be born and a time to die.

But when someone we love dies before growing old, we ask, "Why would God allow this to happen?"

Not an automaton creation

No doubt, God could have made the universe in such a way that nothing ever went wrong. But He didn't. He created a world that is free to be itself—and to express its identity in continually fresh and creative ways. For some reason, He thinks that is good.

Maybe that's because it takes such a world, a wild and free world, to be the breeding ground for things God values in human beings—things like courage, devotion, loyalty, self-sacrifice, kindness, generosity, hope, trust. By anybody's reckoning these are a few of

the noblest features of humanity. Would such qualities exist in a world without risk, danger, calamity—and death?

And where would love be in such a world? Love isn't just a matter of getting along. Love is made real in the crucible of suffering, of self-sacrifice, of loyalty and devotion against the odds.

"Oh really," someone might say. "If God thinks that is so great, why doesn't He just come down here and go through what we go through in His so-called good creation?" Well, that's just what Christians believe He did. And just like death happens to every one of us, He died. But Christians believe that His death changed death itself. He made death a pathway to resurrection, to new life, to a new creation in which "there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain."

As much as we hate to admit it and hate to talk about

and calamity. In love, humans forgive one another, help one another, encourage one another and stand by one another.

God suffers with us

God is not a stranger to human suffering. Christians believe that God became a man, suffered as a human and died as a human, and because of that, humanity itself has been taken up into God's own being. In Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, humanity's cause is now God's cause. When we suffer, God suffers with us.

God loved the world so much, John the Gospel writer recorded, that God gave His Son that whoever believes in Him would have new life. God sent His Son to save the world, He added, not to condemn it.¹

Death is part of life, and every person who lives will also die. Even you and even me. But death is not the



it and throw stones at those who do, we all die. We all die of something. Whether we die of "natural causes" or of "natural disasters" makes little difference in the end. Either way, we die, and nothing will stop it, regardless of how kind we are or how mean we are or how smart, careful or wise we are. But the good news is, regardless of how or when we die, Jesus resurrects the dead.

God could stop all natural movement of earth, air and water. He could stop humans from making mistakes, making unwise decisions, being selfish, or stubborn or rude. God could have made a "Stepford Wives" style creation in which everything worked automatically. But He didn't. God created a world in which something far more valuable than long physical life could exist. He made a world in which love can exist and grow. In love, humans pull together and respond to suffering

end of the story of our lives.

God did not make human beings merely for this life of suffering and grief—He made us for His new creation of fulfilment and joy. The lives cut short now, deprived now, stifled now, cheated now, will find their fulfilment in the life of the new creation. This is the Christian hope, and Christians hold this hope in faith—faith that God who freely took up our human cause as His own, even to the point of dying like a criminal as one of us, is true to His word. Every person who dies will also live.

In this hope and in this love, we extend compassion and help to others. As we do, we experience the deepest riches of true life, riches that are unseen but more real than physical security or safety. Love truly does "make the world go 'round". □

¹ John 3:16–17

Blessing in disguise

by
John McLean

Late last year, Australia experienced the worst floods in our history, followed by cyclones, while other parts of the country have had devastating bushfires. Property has been destroyed, homes ruined, lives have been lost. We have witnessed surges of water hurling cars as if they were toys, washing some houses away, wrecking others, uprooting trees, destroying roads, railway lines and bridges. It has been tragic, sad, and heart-breaking.

Yet in the midst of it all, we have also seen amazing courage, selflessness, cooperation and service. People standing in the midst of their ruined homes, facing the loss of possessions, valuables and the work of a life-time, have smiled, cried, smiled again, and said that life goes on. They have pitched in to help strangers and communities. Neighbours who had previously had only a nodding acquaintance with one another cleared muck from one another's homes together. The "Mud Army" of volunteers embodied the spirit that rose in response to the challenge presented by this devastating natural calamity.

In a crisis, we know, deep down, that people matter more than things. Indeed, at such times it seems we can be clear and certain that family, friends, community and helping one another are the things that really matter.

Terry Sweetman, writing in the *Sunday Mail* (January 16, 2011), after describing his own experience with the Brisbane flood, expressed it cogently: "Materially we are briefly impoverished.

Spiritually we are enriched—now and forever. In exchange for some trinkets and trash devoured by flood waters, we have found some treasures we have forgotten existed.... My pledge is that we will never again neglect the garden of friendship from which we have harvested so much kindness."

In the Sermon on the Mount, probably the best known of Jesus' teaching, Jesus makes the observation that life is more than possessions and eating and drinking. He isn't saying that eating and drinking, and our material possessions, are unimportant, just that there is more to life than these things. He isn't condemning working, earning, going into business, saving, building a house. He is saying that there is more to life than these things.

Deep down, we know this to be true. In times of crisis, the distractions and details of everyday life, the tyranny of the urgent and the pressures of the present seem to fall away and we see, just that much more clearly, just how true it is—life is more than things.

What really matters are our relationships.

God is a relational Being. He is love. And deep down in the human heart there is a need for friendship, fellowship, relationship—a need for love. We know it. We get so busy we forget it, or so distracted by the teeming trivia of life that we are not conscious of it, but we know it to be true.

The story of the Bible is not about a harsh, judgmental God who can't wait to smite us. It's about a God who reveals Himself in Jesus as one who endures all the reality of human life along with us—its ups and downs, pain and celebrations. It's about a God who loves us, and in His grace wants to share His life with us. It's good news in the midst of all the bad news.

Scientists tell us that we are at our happiest when we are helping others. Interesting, isn't it? Not when we are busy accumulating, acquiring, defending, and protecting the "stuff" of life. When Jesus encourages us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, He is talking about our focus, our priorities, in life. And then

He says we won't need to worry about all the other stuff—it will be provided.

He is telling us how to simplify the complexities in life—by prioritising the things that really matter.

If life is truly more than material trinkets and trash, why do we spend so much time and effort dedicated to their pursuit? If the treasure of life is spiritual, relational, why not make that our focus and priority? And at the heart of this is the treasure of a relationship with

God. "Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom,"¹ Jesus said.

The kingdom is relational—sharing the life of the Father, Son and Spirit. Through Jesus, we share in this life, and in this righteousness. (It's not a matter of working harder to become more righteous by ourselves—it's participating in the righteousness of Christ.) No wonder Jesus' repeated admonition here is "don't be overly anxious," or simply, "don't worry".

If our priorities are spiritual, kingdom-focused, we can get on with life—a life of love and service. Through His incarnation (becoming one of us), Jesus has redeemed all of life, so we can by all means enjoy the physical while we have it, but at the same time we can set our hearts on the imperishable, the permanent, the eternal. Life is more than stuff, possessions. It's about people, grace, kindness and love. It's about enjoying relationship with God and one another.

Why wait for a crisis? □



¹ Luke 12:32

Mateship: *Imago Aussie?*

A few years ago a book was published about Australia, called *The Lucky Country*. Although the term found its way into our self-talk, we haven't been feeling so lucky lately. Earlier this year, in just one month:

Flash floods inundated an area the size of France and Germany combined. Lives were lost, homes and crops destroyed.

Cyclone Yasi ploughed across the Barrier Reef and the Queensland coast, leaving devastation in its wake.

Raging bush fires took out homes and property on the edge of Perth.



by
Kerry Gubb

accumulated culture, our history and our experiences together. Mateship is the “Aussie spirit”. It’s the Aussies’ self-image: *Imago Aussie*. If you ever visit here, you’ll probably find yourself called “mate” by total strangers. Consider it a compliment.

Uniquely Australian?

I’m as fiercely proud of mateship as anyone. I have to disagree, however, with some who think it’s unique to our country. We might be more open about it, but Australians are not the only ones who come together in a crisis and rise to the challenge of a natural disaster. Each nation, community, neighbourhood, family and



It was a reminder that Australia is not a passive, easily tamed land. But when it does its worst to us, it seems to bring out the best in us. It also reminds me of why I’m so proud of my people.

Disasters tend to awaken the smouldering embers of the exocentric image of God in us.

“We’re Aussies: we stick together” is felt, spoken and lived out every time this unbroken mustang of a land fights back with fire, wind or water. It’s a national psyche we call “mateship”. Mateship is our word for a phenomenon highly influenced by our land, our

couple has its own variation on the same broad theme. They might call it something else, and they will display it in ways that reflect their own history, culture and experience. But mateship is common to all who are made in the image of God. Because God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is mateship: relationship, community, communion. God is whatever words we use in our own languages and cultural contexts to convey the concept of “You are in me and I am in you. We stick together. I will never leave you, nor forsake you.”¹

Here’s the difference, though. That’s how God is all

the time. Always has been, always will be. Outgoing love: an orientation that Tom Smail, with the help of Pannenberg, calls “the exocentricity of our humanity”.² We’re not like God all the time. In fact, we’re not like Him most of the time, are we? That’s because in us the image of God (*Imago Dei*) is distorted and hindered by our self-centered, egocentric orientation. Only in rare moments does “the exocentricity that constitutes our humanity” break “through the egocentricity that defies and denies it.”³

So for most of the time, we live egocentrically, giving little thought for community, while doing our own thing, enabled by our egocentric, individualistic, materially-affluent lifestyle and unaware of the family two doors down on our street.

Until there’s a flood.

Until there’s a cyclone or hurricane.

Until there’s a fire.

Disasters are just that. Nobody enjoys them. But they do tend to awaken the smouldering embers of the exocentric image of God in us. That’s when we might just think that the family two doors down might need some help. And in the briefest of time, from a street full of proximate but functional strangers, emerges a new entity: a community of friends—mates—lending each other a hand.

¹ Hebrews 13:5

² Smail, Tom. (2005). *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity*. Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, p.123

³ *Ibid.*, p.124

⁴ Colossians 1:15–17

⁵ Acts 17:28

There were countless comments from the grateful owners of flooded and wind-ravaged homes about how overwhelmed they were to have people they’d never actually met, helping them clear out the rubble and restore their lives. It was incredibly uplifting to see it. As it was after the Japan, New Zealand and Haiti earthquakes and the California wildfires. As it was in the wake of Katrina and Ike hurricanes. As it was after the Boxing Day Tsunami, or as the world held its breath for the trapped Chilean miners.

I’m fiercely proud of the way my people have responded to the unprecedented natural disasters of the last few months. Why shouldn’t I be? I’m an Aussie. I can’t help reflecting, though, that such outgoing, “exocentric” community spirit comes not just from the fact that we are cast from an Australian mould, but it is something we share with all humankind. The Son of God didn’t just make us⁴—He became one of us, and still is, and it is in Him that all of us “live and move and have our being.”⁵

Mateship, when all is said and done, may be not so much *Imago Aussie* as it is *Imago Dei*—the fact that we are made in the image of the Triune God. □

For the love of God: hurting for the hurting in Japan

Horror was the first emotion that went through my mind when I saw pictures of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. This was quickly followed by a deep heartache for all the families affected. Some family members will never be found.

As I read the news and thought sadly about what the families were going through, I received an e-mail stating that this earthquake and tsunami were proof we were at the end time.

It didn’t take long for prophecy buffs to jump on this disaster and declare that God is punishing Japan for its sins, and all of us need to take it as a warning. The end is near!

I went from horrified and heartsick to angry. There was no mention in the e-mail about praying for or doing something to help the thousands of injured and the untold numbers who have suddenly lost friends and family members. There was no hint of concern about the economic aftermath that will impact huge numbers of God’s beloved children who are suddenly without homes and jobs on top of everything else they are going through.

I thought about the plethora of false ideas about God that prevent His children from seeing Him as the God of love that He is. God didn’t cause that earthquake; rather He was there with His children during the earthquake

**by
Rick
Shallenberger**

and the following tsunami.

My anger turned to pity. I started feeling sorry for those who only see God as a vengeful Enforcer who is punishing people for their sins. I realised that this view of God prevents people from knowing God, from being in a close, positive relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

“God is love,” 1 John 4:8 says. That is a simple but profound description. The reason God sent His Son was that He loves the whole world—everyone.¹ God loves every person who lost his or her life in Japan. God loves every person who is grieving. And He even loves those who are using a tragedy to promote their own misguided view of Him.

My pity turned to resolve. This disaster isn’t about deciphering prophecies. Like all disasters, it’s a call to care, to pray, and to do what we can to help others in need, sharing God’s love with them. The end will come when the end will come, but it’s not our job to worry about that. Our job is to be, as we are able and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the collective hands, feet and heart of Jesus Christ in the world until that day—and beyond. May it be so. □

¹ John 3:16–17

Patience tha

When we think of the word ‘patience’ we may recall some of those embarrassing moments when we failed to remain cool and calm in situations that we found frustrating. Perhaps it was a traffic jam, a long waiting line in a store, or dealing with a difficult person. Scripture encourages us to be kind and not easily provoked during those times that try our patience.¹ I don’t know about you, but I need more of that kind of patience.

The Bible, in most translations, also uses the word ‘patience’ as synonymous with ‘perseverance’ or ‘endurance’, admonishing us to continue to do good deeds throughout our lives, in spite of whatever difficulties we may face. Ideally, our Christian life is one of actively and patiently or consistently doing good. We see this expressed in Paul’s letter to the Christians in Galatia. “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest (of God-given blessings) if we do not give up.”²

Clearly, God encourages us to be steadfast in well doing on our jobs, in fulfilling our family responsibilities, and doing good to others. He is pleased when we do good to others, and He promises to reward us for our acts of kindness, even acts as small as giving a thirsty person a glass of water.

However, even knowing these things, we can become weary in doing good—when life is going well, or when life becomes difficult.

Patience in good times

When life is sailing along smoothly it is easy for us to let our Christian life stagnate. We may become lax in our job or family duties, or sit too long in front of the TV. We may even think we have ‘done enough’, or relax our efforts believing that Jesus’ return is far in the future.³

The Apostle Paul told the Galatians, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”⁴ His words apply to us as well, encouraging us to be consistently aware of opportunities to help others.

Paul praised the Thessalonians for their labor of love and recognised that their inspiration came from their faith in Jesus. “We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired



by
Paul Hailey

by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵

Let us heed the words of Paul, “And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.”⁶

Patience in difficult times

When life gets difficult we can easily become discouraged, and even wonder if we still are in God’s favour. But here again, God encourages us to be steadfast, to maintain hope, to persevere through any and all difficulties.⁷ The word ‘hope’ implies more than wishful thinking. Instead, it is absolute assurance of God’s faithfulness to His promises.

We need to keep in mind that God often uses difficulties to shape and improve our character, or to bring unexpected blessings. Consider the example of Joseph. His brothers didn’t like him so they sold him into slavery in Egypt. His Egyptian master’s wife falsely accused him, causing him to be put in prison.

Joseph could have become discouraged or bitter, but instead he set a remarkable example of encouraging and helping other prisoners. This led to him finding favour with fellow prisoners and the prison warden. In due time, after years of prison, he was elevated to the second highest office in Egypt, a position that enabled him to bring his family from their famine-stricken homeland. When Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, they were struck with fear, knowing that he could use his authority to retaliate for their mistreatment of him. But

Joseph, realising that God had been behind the entire time, wisely said, “Don’t be afraid...you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”⁸

God *always* has our eternal welfare in mind. Those unpleasant ‘setbacks’ in our lives often are divine ‘setups’ for more blessings in the future.

James, the Lord’s brother, admonishes us to “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”⁹ Be joyful? I don’t know anyone who is giddy with joy when facing trials. James is encouraging us to recognise that in our difficulties, God is working in our lives, shaping and improving our character.

Jesus warned that Christians would face serious

*“Some Christians today do
suffer torture, imprisonment,
and death. God is intimately
aware of all our trials. He sent
encouragement to Christians of
long ago...”*

t perseveres



difficulties, sometimes even loss of life. Some Christians today do suffer torture, imprisonment, and death. God is intimately aware of all our trials. He sent encouragement to Christians of long ago (and also to us) who were facing martyrdom for their beliefs. “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”¹⁰ Beyond *any and all* of our difficulties lies eternal life.

We might ask, where does persevering patience come from, especially in extreme cases such as martyrdom?

Some keys to persevering patience

King David often felt weary from the many life-threatening difficulties he experienced. But he persisted in prayer. “I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry.”¹¹ At the end of his life David was able to look back and praise God, realising that He had been with him all the time.

The Apostle John wrote the following words of encouragement to Christians who were being persecuted in the first century, “This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.”¹²

Here then, are three keys to persevering patience—prayer, obedience to God’s commandments (love for God and man), and faithfulness to our Lord and Saviour Jesus. We can be patient and persevering Christians who will in due time receive eternal life and a personal reward from Jesus.

“So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised.”¹³ ■

¹ Matthew 4:19

² Exodus 3:14

³ 1 Peter 2:21

⁴ Matthew 10:25

⁵ Galatians 2:20

⁶ Romans 7:18–25

⁷ Matthew 4:19

⁸ Exodus 3:14

⁹ 1 Peter 2:21

¹⁰ Matthew 10:25

¹¹ Galatians 2:20

¹² Romans 7:18–25

¹³ Romans 7:18–25

God in our

Tragedies strike us from time to time—often unexpectedly.¹ Some tragedies are caused by natural disasters such as the recent floods in Australia and the earthquake, tsunami and radiation in Japan. However, most are man-made like the killing of innocent lives in North Africa and the Middle East.

There are also other ‘tragedies’ as financial crises, accidents, sicknesses, depression and death of loved ones. Not to mention the tragedies of broken relationships between God and man, man and man, and man and the environment.

Reality of suffering

Irrespective of whether they are natural or man-made, all tragedies produce pain, sorrow, fear, loss, disappointment and grief. An example is the recent tragedy in Japan and the trauma that the people living there have to go through. Our heart goes out to them because they are very much a part of us—fellow human beings, brothers and sisters.

The entire human race is together in this reality of pain, suffering, fear, sorrow and grief. No individual, group or nation is excluded. When a tragedy strikes, it affects everyone in one way or another or to one degree or another because we are a *connected* community. We are connected by family, social and business ties. We are like the human body with many parts, where if one part suffers, the whole body suffers.² For example, the Japan tragedy has affected millions of lives—friends, relatives, business partners—everywhere. Not to mention its effect on the environment such as the marine life, vegetation and livestock.

Where is God?

When tragedies like these strike, we naturally ask, “God, where are you? Why me? What did I do?” We sympathise with the victims—those who lost their loved ones, those who sustained injuries, those who lost everything. Our hearts go out to them. We weep and grieve with them.

Why didn’t God prevent these tragedies? After all, isn’t He all-powerful, merciful and gracious? At the least, He could have intervened and minimised the



by
**Dr. P.
Sellappan**

sufferings. It seems that God is either powerless or that He simply doesn’t care. We might even say, “If I were God, I would have intervened and brought relief to the hurting people.” When we reason like this, we are in effect telling God that we are more loving and more caring than He is, thus setting ourselves above God. [Actually, God does intervene as we have seen the whole world reaching out to help the Japanese victims.]

Yes, why does God allow tragedies and sufferings? Why does He let people—even good people—die? While we may not have all the answers, the Bible can give us some hints.

Relationship breakdown

When God created the earth and Adam and Eve, He

pronounced everything “very good”. Adam and Eve enjoyed intimate fellowship with God and with each other. They experienced love, joy, peace, security and intimacy. They also were in harmony with nature. They enjoyed a heavenly life in the beautiful Garden of Eden. But it was short-lived.

Sin entered the scene. Satan seduced Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—the Tree of Death. They ate the forbidden fruit (living life apart from God) and from that time

onwards things went awry. Something had gone wrong terribly. Sin corrupted everything—our relationship with God, our relationship with one another and our relationship with the environment.

The Book of Genesis gives a brief account of the relationship “meltdown”. Adam and Eve went into hiding because of shame and guilt. Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed Satan, and Satan probably justified his action. That running away from God, that blame game, that self-justification has been the human story ever since. That’s why we have strained relationships with God, with one another and with the environment. We look for good fruits, but reap bad fruits—thorns and thistles, wars and conflicts, typhoons and floods, earthquakes and tsunamis. We live in a fallen world and that’s why we experience pain, fear, confusion, disappointment and sadness.



tragedies!

What can we do about it? Not much. Only God can redeem us and our environment from the fallen state. And that's precisely what He has done for us in Christ Jesus.

Jesus our Redeemer

God sent His Son Jesus to redeem the entire cosmos—our broken relationship with God, with one another and with the environment.³ Jesus has already redeemed the entire creation in His *incarnate* self. He is the *full* image of God (representing all of God) and He is the *full* image of Man (representing all of humanity). He is the true God-Man. God meets us in Christ and we meet God in Christ. He is the meeting point of God and Man. There is no other meeting point.

Jesus has *already* redeemed our fallen humanity. He has reconciled us to God in His perfect *self-giving* to humanity *as God* and in His perfect *self-offering* to God *as Man*. In His self-giving, He poured out God's love for us, withholding nothing.⁴ And in His self-offering, He offered perfect obedience to God on *our* behalf and in our place. He did this in His incarnate self as the God-Man. That is how He has fixed our broken relationships with God and with one another.

That's not all. As Creator, Jesus holds the entire cosmos together including the tiny atoms and molecules and the giant planets and galaxies.⁵ All things visible and invisible—human beings, birds, land and sea creatures, laws of gravity, thermodynamics and astrophysics operate only in Christ. There are no independent human beings, animals, birds or fishes, or independent atoms, molecules, planets, laws or forces. All things “live, move and have their being” in Him.⁶ They don't have independent existence of their own.

Jesus lived a *sinless* life *for us* and on our behalf. He died and paid all our debts. When He died, the whole creation died with Him, and when He rose, the whole creation rose with Him.⁷ That is how He has redeemed us and the cosmos. The full realisation and complete fulfilment of God's deliverance from all sufferings, curses and tragedies will happen when God establishes His new heaven and new earth and dwells with His children—us.⁸

Jesus in our tragedies

We still haven't answered the nagging questions: “God, where were you when my family was swept away in the tsunami, when my spouse died prematurely, when my daughter was raped, when I was afflicted with cancer, when I was in a financial crisis, when my baby died, when my husband betrayed me, when my son took to drugs, when I was facing the gallows, when I needed you most?”

You might even say, “Jesus didn't really experience all the tragedies that we go through. For example, He didn't suffer the devastating effects of earthquake, tsunami or radiation. He didn't experience cancer, old

age or miscarriage. So how can He be my sympathetic High Priest who understands what I am going through?”

Let's *try* to answer this question. All of us (indeed the entire cosmos) are made up of atoms and molecules. We live only because these particles function properly in our bodies. If these particles don't work properly, we fall sick. What if God is invisibly present in these particles but never really altered them or interfered in any way in our personal choices and decision making? Would He then experience the full range of our suffering, fears and losses? Would He then be able to sympathise with us in our darkest moments? I believe He can because He is alongside us from cradle to grave.

As Creator, Jesus holds all things together, from atoms and molecules to planets and galaxies to laws and forces. All things “live, move and have their existence” in Him. So Jesus knows us intimately, even better than we know ourselves. He has literally been in everyone's shoes⁹ as He has taken all our sin and broken-ness into Himself.

Jesus is Immanuel¹⁰ or God with us or God in the flesh.¹¹ Jesus has bound Himself to us—even to our bone and flesh, atoms and molecules. He is present in our psyche and in our thoughts. He is in our fears and in our disappointments, financial crises, addiction, sickness, loneliness, depression, strained relationships, unknowns, earthquakes, tsunamis, death and grief. He knows *everything* about us and what we go through in life.¹² That's why He is our faithful High Priest who can sympathise with us in all our grief.¹³

Sensing reality

While we may *not* see it, Jesus is truly present in all of our lives from cradle to grave. He is not detached or isolated from us. He is always with us. He is in our tragedies, sickness, financial crises, broken relationships, loneliness, fears and disappointments. He suffers in our suffering, grieves in our grief, and dies in our death. He knows us intimately at every stage of our lives. That is how He is our faithful and merciful High Priest.

When we trust Jesus, God sends His Holy Spirit (the third person in the Godhead) to dwell in us. The Spirit “switches” our minds to see reality. The Spirit gives us faith and spiritual understanding. The Spirit comforts¹⁴ and assures us that God loves us and that He is with us in all our tragedies. God has *already* drawn near to us in Jesus and He wants us to draw near to Him so that we can sense and feel His presence in our lives.

So no matter what situation you are in or what tragedies you face, *God is with you*. He has promised *never* to leave or forsake you.¹⁵ May you sense God's love and intimate presence in your innermost being now and forever. ■

¹ James 4:14

² 1 Corinthians 12:26

³ Romans 8:18–23

⁴ Isaiah 53:12; Philippians 2:6–7

⁵ Colossians 1:15–17

⁶ Acts 17:28

⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:14–15

⁸ Revelation 21:1–4; 22:3–5

⁹ Jeremiah 23:23–24; Psalms 139:7–12

¹⁰ Matthew 1:23

¹¹ John 1:14

¹² John 2:24–25; Matthew 9:4; Mark 1:41

¹³ Hebrews 4:14–15

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 1:3–7

¹⁵ Hebrews 13:5

Children: a personal observation

When I first heard a sermon many years ago on the need for Christians to be like little children,¹ I was really intrigued. Yes, we are to be innocent like children and have their childlike attitude, but why children? Half the time children don't know what is happening in the church and after service they would be chasing each other all over the place making a ruckus and being a nuisance to everyone. Of course not all church kids misbehave and that was the time before I have my own children.

Over the years as I observe children more and more, the realisation dawned on me that the analogy used in the bible is ideal, if not perfect. The observation is purely mine and is certainly not complete. The list follows:

Children have not lost their sense of wonder

Children are naturally curious and have inquisitive minds. They want to know their surroundings and the things that happen around them. At the same time they do not get bored easily and prefer a certain rhythm in their lives. This

regularity gives them a sense of security and guidance. My wife's nephew, when he was younger, used to watch the same comedy video tape every morning even though he had watched it dozens of time, if not more. My own son, many years ago, would look forward with anticipation to his weekly trips with his mother to the *pasar malam* (night market). He had been there very often and each trip meant visiting the same stalls selling the same goods. Yet to him, it was like the highlight of the week.

What does this mean to us adults? Are we still eager to listen to sermons every week after hearing maybe hundreds of them so far? Are we jaded from having the same themes in the messages delivered every year during Easter and Christmas? Have we become

by
**Wong
Teik Kong**

'dull of hearing'² that we will only pay attention when new, exciting but unproven doctrines are preached? That we will only attend services when 'powerful speakers' are present? If the answer is yes to any of the questions, then we need to reclaim back the sense of wonder from our younger days.

Children have not lost their ability to trust

As a child grows up, he learns to trust his caregiver automatically. He will accept whatever is taught without question. The child learns that he must depend totally on the parents for almost all things. The child believes and has confidence in the ability of the parents to fulfil all his needs. Properly guided, the trust and reliance on the parents make the child regard

the parents as 'gods'; the ultimate answer to all his problems.

Similarly, when Jesus told His disciples about children and the kingdom of heaven,³ He was telling them that to be in God's kingdom, we must have the qualities of children. We must have complete trust and total reliance on God in

our daily lives. This need for God is more than just believe, it includes commitment, obedience and faith. It means that God takes precedence over all else and no part of our lives is 'independent' of God.

Children have not lost their ability to forgive

Anyone who has come in contact with children will know that children fight often and forgive just as often. Among siblings, some children argue and brawl many times a day. They also seem to forget about those conflicts as easily as they started them. Young children seldom bear overnight grudges. They forgive and forget quickly because they know they need each other



continued on page 18

Of what value is a life?

A friend of mine died. He died by his own hands. Why he ended his life so tragically is a question I still can't answer.

The last I saw him was in September of last year when we were both at an examination centre to sit for two papers in order to qualify for a promotion in our job. I saw him seated alone at the canteen while the other candidates were busy doing last minute revision for the exam. I had arrived early hoping to spend some time preparing myself for the exam but upon seeing him I decided to join him. We started talking. We both got into a lively conversation as there was much we had to share. As it is the custom among friends, we talked about everything that affected us including politics. His jovial self was evident as usual and there was not the slightest indication of depression or worry on his face. Three months later he was dead.

When I heard the news I couldn't believe it. He was not the kind of person who would contemplate let alone do something like this. Yet it happened to him. Why? Here was a person who was known for helping others. Always busy with many projects, he occupied himself fully and was always cheerful to anyone who met him. When I went to his house the night I heard of his passing, there was already a crowd there. Many friends were there totally stumped as to why he took this drastic decision. I walked into the house and stood beside his coffin together with others to pay our respects. His wife sat by his side totally in shock, his children deeply traumatized.

People started to talk. Some said that he was in one kind of trouble while others said that he was involved in something else. I didn't care. I was only saddened that a man with such potential had to end his life this way.

Today in Malaysia, hundreds of people attempt suicide. The nation has a vision to achieve developed nation status by 2020 but many people cannot cope with the stress of everyday life. What is most shocking is the fact that the most number of suicides are attempted by those in the 30 to 39 age bracket followed by those in the 20 to 29 age bracket. The youngest person who committed suicide last year was twelve years old. The national suicide registry report for 2008 stated that 249 people committed suicide that year. The health ministry reported that everyday an average of seven people; mainly youths and young adults end their own lives. The Befrienders of Kuala Lumpur received 388 emails and 3,853 calls last year from suicidal people. Few of us realize how many people are walking around deeply troubled and for whom life has little meaning.



by
**Devaraj
Ramoo**

We live in a highly pretentious society. Everybody projects an image of being prosperous and happy. But deep within, people grapple with insurmountable problems. Debts, failed relationships, problematic children, violence, crime, bias, mental illness and other debilitating problems soon take their toll. Few know where to turn to for help. Though there are voluntary organizations that specialize in aiding troubled individuals, yet many people keep their agonizing troubles to themselves often not even revealing anything to their own spouses or family members. At some point rational thinking evades them and under extreme pressure they resort to ending the agony through suicide.

It's easy for someone who is not affected, to pass judgment on those who choose this tragic path. Foolish, idiotic, irresponsible, immature, cowardly and plain stupid are some of the words people use in their explanations for how suicide victims had conducted themselves. But no one needs to regard his life as

“...no one needs to regard his life as meaningless or without value. No matter what the troubles faced, people need to realize that life is precious...”

meaningless or without value. No matter what the troubles faced, people need to realize that life is precious and above all the Almighty God who created us has made mankind in His image.¹ In fact the worst trouble faced by mankind is the penalty of eternal death because of sin. Yet a loving God decided to rescue mankind from this penalty by allowing His own Son to sacrifice Himself in order to save us.² God took upon Himself our most debilitating spiritual condition and paid the penalty

in our stead. In fact even under the most painful situation in our lives there should be hope, not despair because we have been delivered from eternal death. What about those who have committed suicide and are dead? Have they no hope to be rescued? The truth is that they do have hope because Christ's sacrifice covers everyone. My friend as well as many others will rise in the resurrection to the hope that is in Christ Jesus. No one is left out.

The resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ is a promise from God. Therefore, if suicide beckons, then put your life in the hands of Christ Jesus who said “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”³ This promise has never failed. Suicide is not the answer, turning to Christ is. □

¹ Genesis 1: 26–27

² John 3:16

³ Matthew 11:28–29

Train up

Most Christian parents want nothing more than for their children to know Jesus Christ. For years I read several scriptural passages that informed my approach to parenting. For example, Deuteronomy 6:7, in the context of the commandments that God gave to the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt, says, “Impress them [the commandments] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, and when you lie down and when you get up.”

by
Jeb Egbert

right!

Is it really all on you?

But is a child's eternal relationship with God truly a function of parental or caregiver teaching? Some parents work with their children from a young age, reading from the Bible, praying with and for their children, exposing them to multiple church activities and functions, ensuring they attend camps and mission trips, exposing them to passionate and charismatic



Proverbs 22:6, in my understanding at the time, put a great deal of pressure on parents, for it said, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”

Such passages convinced me that my children's commitment to Jesus was squarely a function of how I trained them. Only if I did my job well would my children “not turn from” the way they should go. What pressure! I had better get this Christian parenting thing

youth ministers, only to see their children dismiss Christianity as adults.

In my ministry of some 30 years, much of it exclusively focused on working with children and adolescents, I have been approached by numerous “model” Christian parents who harbour guilt and shame because despite their having faithfully followed all the “right” childrearing principles, their children reach adulthood with no interest in developing a

a child...

relationship with Jesus.

God wants our children to have a relationship with Him. He is at work in them, and He is patient in that work.

Early in my ministry I would have concluded that such parents had not done a good job of bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.¹ No matter how devoted they had been, I would have thought, if they had truly done their jobs, their children would automatically grow into committed Christian adults.

Parental role

Research shows that many who enter a committed relationship with Jesus did so before the age of 13. George Barna's research in 2004 (www.barna.org) indicates "that nearly half of all Americans who accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour do so before reaching the age of 13 (43%), and that two out of three born again Christians made that commitment to Christ before their 18th birthday." Furthermore, Barna's research shows that "among Christians who embraced Christ before their teen years, half were led to Christ by their parents, with another one in five led by some other friends or relatives."

The words of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:14–15 are of interest in this context: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation

through faith in Jesus Christ." Parents clearly have an important role, but that does not change the fact that faith is a personal matter, one that all individuals must decide on for themselves.

At what age can children begin trusting in Christ?

Many Christians believe that children must be a certain age before they can truly understand the fullness of the gospel message of Jesus. In my early ministry I was convinced that pre-adolescent (and even adolescent) children were not mature enough to make a commitment to Jesus. I expected young people to be of a certain age, and even then, I emphasised their "producing fruit in keeping with repentance."² I couldn't imagine a child even knowing the full ramification of what "repentance" means.

So what is repentance? Several years ago, my wife shared an experience with me regarding a time when she was working with relatively young children in a children's ministry. She said that when a small boy, around the age of 6, was asked about his commitment, he simply said, "I choose God." Wow! What more needs to be said with respect to repentance?

One of the great moments of my life was watching one of my sons, early in his teen years, kneeling with a friend and taking communion. It was a moment I will

never forget. Could it be real? Could it be lasting? He seemed too young.

The will and work of Jesus

Peter says in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

This is the same Peter who said in Acts 15:11, "We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved."

Grace is the work of Jesus, not the work of parents. Parents are flawed. We make mistakes. But grace covers those mistakes. Grace says, "In spite of mistakes, I love you and will redeem you." Timothy adds, "This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."³

Jesus' work is a work of grace, and it is a work that is alive in all people, including our children. Jesus is patient. His timing is different than ours.

We want to know that our children have a committed relationship with Jesus, and we are perplexed or even disturbed when we do not see evidence of such a relationship. But we can rest in the fact that not only is God patient with all, He wants all to be saved.

Parents have an important role to play in teaching their children about an enduring relationship with Jesus. But a child's choices are not completely dependent on how well parents teach them.

God wants our children to have a relationship with Him. He is at work in them, and He is patient in that work. That doesn't diminish the importance of our instruction of our children. But it should give us pause to trust our children to God instead of fretting over them ourselves. Our role as parents is only one small part of the picture. Jesus' role as Redeemer is what really matters.

So what should we do?

Given this, it is the responsibility of adults to follow the biblical admonition to

teach our children and to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And if we do, can we know with certainty that our children will have the deep, abiding, intimate relationship with God that we pray for? No, we can't. But thank God it doesn't depend on us.

What we can know is that God loves our children unconditionally, that Christ has included them in His atoning and redemptive work, that He will never cease to work with them and will never let them go.

As a parent, I can think of no better assurance than that! ☐

¹ Ephesians 6:4

² Matthew 3:8

³ 1 Timothy 2:3–4

Our children—a precious legacy

In some ways, it seems astonishing that God gives human beings the responsibility of raising the next generation. Given that human beings are designed for an eternal, intimate relationship with God, each person has value beyond measuring. None of us as parents are perfect, and it is frankly shocking and heart-rending to see the way some children have been treated by selfish and even cruel parents. Yet, despite our failings, we have been designed for this parenting responsibility.

Though there are far too many examples of poor parenting, it does seem that having children actually draws the best out of many people. Having children who depend on us can teach us to deny ourselves, and make sacrifices that we would otherwise not make. In that way, the gift of children and family life can help us understand God better.

God is love, and cares for those whom He has brought into being. In a much reduced way, we as parents are often stretched to learn what love really is as we learn to care for those whom we have helped bring into the world through the miracle of human birth.

Though the family is under tremendous assault in our modern self-loving culture, there is still durability to this incredibly important institution. The old saying is still true, that the family is the key building block of any healthy society.

God has designed human beings to live in relationship with Him as adopted children. This is our destiny, and what He desires for each and every person. We are invited to pray to Him as our heavenly Father—and view ourselves as His beloved children.

by
Gary Moore

The design of family life is intended to introduce us to the sort of loving, caring relationships that are but a shadow of how our triune God lives. This relationship is what He makes available to us through Jesus Christ, and is the way we are intended to live throughout eternity.

We can't offer our children the perfection of God—far from it. Nevertheless, we as parents can offer them love, support, nurture, guidance and positive moral direction as they mature and pursue their lives. We can help them develop sound traits of character, a caring and merciful nature, and the capacity to persevere and endure hardship.

These are among the attributes that will be hugely beneficial for them as they face the challenges this life brings.

But we also have the opportunity to teach them about God. The knowledge that the universe has a creator and a purpose, and human life is designed with an amazing destiny in mind by that creator will help them understand where they fit in the scheme of things. Teaching them to pray, and to cultivate a relationship with the reality of God can help set them on the road toward the ultimate parent/child relationship that lies at the core of God's plan.

Indeed, our children are a precious legacy, and a gift from God. Our lives are blessed and enriched by the relationships we share with them, and we are stretched to a deeper understanding of love, sacrifice and sharing. As we read in the Psalms, "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, and children a reward from Him."¹ □

¹ Psalm 127:3

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to play with! A child who does not forgive will soon learn that he has no friends. They need each other to enjoy their company.

This piece of wisdom seems to escape some adults. Hatred, bitterness and an unforgiving spirit are alien to a child. Somewhere in the process of growing up, we acquire and accumulate these negative traits. Pride somehow gets the better of us. We must not only imitate the spirit of forgiveness of children, we need also not to harbour resentment, jealousy and envy. These are not typical characteristics of a normal child.

Children have not lost their ability to change and grow

When a friend or relative meets up with a child after an absence of even a few months, the usual greeting is that the child has changed or grown a lot or even become unrecognisable. A child that does not grow is not a normal child. With physical growth comes

changes in the intellectual and emotional realms. The child is developing into a more mature stage in his life.

The same is expected of Christ's followers. We cannot be stagnant in our spiritual growth. We have to change for the better⁴. We are supposed to be refreshed every day. Like children, our growth may not be consistent. It may come in sudden spurts followed by long periods of little change. But grow we must for the church cannot afford to stand still.

Christ used the example of children to point out some important lessons for us adults. Indeed there is much that we can learn from little children. Let's regain the positive aspects of childhood. After all, God considers us His *children*.⁵ □

¹ Matthew 18:3

² Hebrews 5:11

³ Mark 10:14

⁴ 2 Peter 3:18

⁵ Philippians 2:15

Seeing disasters through God's lens

With the recent series of devastating earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions, as well as worldwide economic crises and political unrest across the Middle East and northern Africa, many Christians are asking themselves whether we are at last entering what Jesus called "the end of the age." I want to share with you several key factors that we all need to keep in mind.

First is that Jesus and Paul said that no one, including the church, would know when Christ would return.¹ We are told instead to be always ready, for the express reason that we would *not* know.

Second is that the events Jesus described to the



by
**Dr. Joseph
Tkach**

Revelation, is not there for us to use or interpret in just any way we please. The apostle Paul wrote that the Scriptures are "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus... All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."³ That is what the Bible is for, and that is how we should use it, not for predicting the end of the age or for condemning people who don't yet know Christ.

Despite the fact that the Bible tells us what it is and what it should be used for, it is still probably the most misused book in the world. Some seem to think they can find the answer to any question imaginable



disciples² were not about our time, but about *their* time—"this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened," he said. And those things, preserved in highly symbolic apocalyptic writing, did take place in their generation when the Romans sacked Jerusalem and leveled the temple.

The biblical concept of the "end of the ages" often refers to the Incarnation of Christ for the salvation of humanity, something that happened in the first century and continues forward forever. For example, Hebrews 9:26 says, "But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself."

Third is that the Bible, including the book of

somewhere within its pages. They regard it as the final authority on matters of diet, what to wear, what entertainment is allowable, what hobbies to have, and so on. And of course, some claim they can use it to calculate when the "end time" will be.

People have been making such claims throughout the centuries, during every crisis period, including such terrifying times as the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius and the obliteration of Pompeii, the terror surrounding the approach of the year 1000, the bubonic plague of Europe which killed one of every three persons across the continent, the worldwide flu epidemics of the 19th

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Up, down, and content through it all

On a shelf in my office stands a first-place trophy for bowling. Draped over it is a last-place crying towel. I keep them together to remind me of life's ups and downs. One day you're on top and the next you may be at the bottom.

Paul understood this well. In Philippians 4:11–12 he said: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." As you can read in his letters, he experienced many ups and downs, more than most of us ever have or will.

When Paul said he knew what it meant to be in need, he wasn't kidding. While I'm sure he didn't enjoy the times of need, he learned from them and kept going. He learned, and so can we, to be thankful for the times we're flying high (in all things give thanks) but not surprised when things turn sour (think it not strange when fiery trials come). And like Paul, we can learn to be content in every situation.

That is so easy to say, yet so hard to do. But if Paul could do it, can't we? We have the same Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us through the deep valleys. We have the joy of the Lord as our strength. We have the hope of the resurrection and the promise of eternal life. And we have Jesus, who understands everything we're going through.

Jesus experienced His share of life's ups and downs, too. As we read in John 1:1, He enjoyed the glory of the Godhead from eternity. But Philippians

by
Tammy Tkach

2 explains that He didn't hold on to it, but humbled Himself to come to us as a baby, born in humble circumstances. He learned to walk and to talk and to work, building with His dad. He then became a rabbi, a big accomplishment in His society. He was followed by crowds and sought after by the sick and hurting. For a normal human, such things might be cause for celebration. I'm sure Jesus took them in stride. Among His high points must have been the incredible intimacy He enjoyed with His Father.

He also had lows: betrayal, trial, crucifixion and death. A big high followed—the resurrection.

I used to think Jesus understands us simply because He was human. But I think there's more to it. We often don't understand everything behind a trial or even a mountaintop experience. Sometimes that's a good thing. But Jesus, the Son of God incarnate, really did understand. We can rest assured that even though He wasn't a woman, didn't have to go through old age or debilitating disease, or any of the other experiences we sometimes wonder if He can relate to, He understands.

We *will* have our ups and downs. We'll have trials and we'll have high moments. We'll continue to earn first-place trophies and crying towels. Neither should surprise or devastate us. Remember Paul, content in every situation. Remember Jesus, who understands more than we can comprehend. Enjoy the highs and don't worry about the lows. Make the best of them, as one team on my bowling league jokes, and make a quilt out of all those crying towels! ■

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and 20th centuries, the First and Second World Wars, the Gulf Wars, and so on, up to and including today's crises.

Such predictions are always wrong, of course, but that does not stop determined wannabe prophets. They simply plunge back in, searching the Scriptures carefully until they come up with another creative interpretation. Such obsession is born of many things, but among them is a craving to be special, to know supposed secret things that others don't know.

Earthquakes and tsunamis are not God's punishment on sinners. The God revealed in Jesus Christ sends his *grace* to undeserving sinners, not plagues.

Earthquakes are earthquakes. They're a fact of nature. They are not the result of God unleashing his fury upon unbelievers. They are the result of natural shifts in the earth's crust. We prepare for them by learning how to avoid being struck or trapped by falling debris and keeping on hand an "earthquake kit" that contains emergency supplies to last for a few days. We don't prepare for them by manufacturing unbiblical notions about the end of the age and about whom God

loves and hates.

God loves the whole world, which is why he sent his Son to save it. And Jesus commanded us to love even our enemies, just as he loves his enemies (which we all once were) and gave himself for them.⁴ So it is not a time to panic. It is a time to do what we can to help others during whatever crises and needs arise.

The apostle Paul wrote that we should always be ready for the end of the age, not by feeding our prediction addiction, but by "putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet," knowing that "God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ".⁵

We have no need to be alarmed by the empty declarations of would-be prophets that "the end is upon us." Rather, in Christ, as the beloved children of the Father, we are here to bring God's love to bear on the suffering of others until that great day of his appearing, when at last every eye will see and every knee will bow before the One who loves the whole world and gave himself to save it. ■

¹ Matthew 24:36

² Matthew 24,
Mark 13,
Luke 21

³ 2 Timothy
3:15–16

⁴ Romans 5:8, 10

⁵ 1 Thessalonians
5:8–9

When we're young we usually don't think much about growing old, or about our parents growing old either—not until something forces us to think about it. But it will happen, if they live long enough. So the first thing I'd say to those whose parents are growing older is to be prepared for it, and to accept whatever

responsibilities it brings you.

Then be patient with them. They may not be able to do everything they once did, but that doesn't mean they're necessarily helpless or incompetent. And be alert to their

needs—including their emotional and spiritual needs. Sometimes they just need to know that you're there, and that you care. Be sensitive also. Occasionally I've seen children become heavy-handed and insensitive

when dealing with their aging parents, and it only caused resentment and hard feelings. On the other hand, it may become necessary to step in and insist that they turn over the car keys, or let you handle their finances, or even arrange for them to move to a

place where they'll get better care. They may resist, and you need to put yourself in their shoes and realize the turmoil these changes can cause them. But they need to realize that you're doing it because you love them and want what's best for them. And pray for them also, that they will experience God's peace and comfort as they grow older. Some day you'll be there also, and what you do now will be an example to

Quotes by Rob Bell

The moment God is figured out with nice neat lines and definitions, we are no longer dealing with God.

[The Bible] has to be interpreted. And if it isn't interpreted, then it can't be put into action. So if we are serious about following God, then we have to interpret the Bible. It is not possible to simply do what the Bible says. We must first make decisions about what it means at this time, in this place, for these people.

Agape doesn't love somebody because they're worthy. Agape makes them worthy by the strength and power of its love. Agape doesn't love somebody because they're beautiful. Agape loves in such a way that it makes them beautiful.

If the gospel isn't good news for everybody, then it isn't good news for anybody.

Think about some of the words that are used in these kinds of discussions, one of the most common being the phrase "open-minded." Often the person with spiritual convictions is seen as close-minded and others are seen as open-minded. What is fascinating to me is that at the center of the Christian faith is the assumption that this life isn't all there is. That there is more to life than the material. That existence is not limited to what we can see, touch, measure, taste, hear, and observe. One of the central assertions of the Christian worldview is that there is "more" – Those who oppose this insist that this is all there is, that only what we can measure and observe and see with our eyes is real. There is nothing else. Which perspective is more "closed-minded?" Which perspective is more "open?"

This is why for thousands of years Christians have found the cross to be so central to life. It speaks to us of God's suffering, God's pain, God's broken heart. It's God making the first move and then waiting for our response.

your own children.
Billy Graham

Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating. By judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Live your life as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as though you were to live forever.
Mahatma Gandhi

If you want to make peace, don't talk to your friends. Talk to

your enemies.
Moshe Dayan

When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall. Think of it—always.
Mahatma Gandhi

We could never learn to be brave and patient, if there were only joy in the world!
Helen Keller

It is impossible to rightly govern a nation without God and the Bible.
George Washington

A Christian's story is not about his or her triumphs, but about his or her failures and Christ's supreme victory over them. If told honestly and artfully, that story possesses the power to spur other tales of transformation while fortifying community. But first, that story must be shared.

Kristen Scharold

Sit down before a fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion.

Thomas Huxley

It's extremely important not to assault people. I gave a sermon about the extraordinary variability in the way that Christ approached different people when he was giving a message. He kind of confronts the young ruler: "It's easier to pass through the eye of a camel than for a rich man to get into heaven." Even Christ tried to meet people where they were rather than just being harsh with everybody. He speaks to the woman at the well. Sometimes I think evangelicals come at people so hard and so fast and don't take time to listen to where somebody is. We can just try to have a lighter touch sometimes.

Condoleezza Rice

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

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

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The God revealed in

Who are you, Lord?
“Who are you, Lord?” was Paul’s anguished question on the Damascus Road, where he was confronted by the resurrected Jesus.¹ He spent the rest of his life answering this question and then sharing the answer with all who would listen. The answer, revealed to us in Scripture, is the heart of the gospel and the focus of Trinitarian theology.

Jesus is fully God and fully human, and that will never change. His Incarnation did not end with His death or with His ascension. It continues forever. He was resurrected and ascended bodily. He will return bodily, the same as He departed. So when we say Jesus Christ, we are saying God, and we are also saying “humanity”.

As the One who is uniquely God (Creator and Sustainer of all) and also fully human, Jesus, in Himself, is the unique union of God and humanity. In and through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, all humans are included in the life and love of God. As the apostle Paul wrote, the man Jesus is the one mediator for all people—past, present, and future.²

For all humanity

The scope of Christ’s vicarious human life extends to all who have ever lived.

Likewise, the Bible declares that Jesus died for everyone—and that His death applies to everyone now. Relevant passages include:

- John 12:32: “I [Jesus], when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.”
- 2 Corinthians 5:14: “Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.”
- Colossians 1:19–20: “God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him

by
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Communion
International**

to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.”

- 1 Timothy 2:3–6: “This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is

one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men.”

- 1 Timothy 4:9–10: “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance... that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe.”

• Hebrews 2:9: “We see Jesus, who...suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.”

- 1 John 2:2: “[Jesus is] the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

• See also John 1:29; 3:17; Romans 8:32; 2 Corinthians 5:18–19; Titus 2:11; and 1 John 4:14.

These passages make it plain that Jesus died for all humanity.

Jesus, the second Adam

In Romans 5, Paul addresses believers, but what he says applies to all humanity—believers and non-believers alike. According to Paul, through Jesus, all humans are...

- Justified through the faith of Christ (vv. 1, 18).
- At peace with God (v. 1).
- Standing in His grace (v. 2).
- Reconciled to God through the death of Jesus (v. 10).

• Saved through Jesus’ life (v. 10).
This justification, reconciliation and salvation occurred:

- When we were “still powerless” (v. 6).
- When we were “still sinners” (v. 8).
- When we were still “God’s enemies” (v. 10).



Jesus Christ (Part 2)

God did all this for us before we were even born. The benefit of what Jesus did so long ago extends to the past, to the present and into the future. Paul says, “how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life” (v. 10)—showing that salvation is not a one-time transaction, but an enduring relationship that God has with all humanity—a relationship forged within the person of Jesus Christ—the one who, in Himself, has brought God and humanity together in peace.

Continuing in Romans 5, Paul compares the first Adam to Jesus, calling the latter the “second” or “final” Adam. Note Paul’s main points:

- “Just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam]...[and] all sinned...” (v. 12).
- “How much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ [the second Adam], overflow to the many?” (v. 15).
- And, “just as the result of one trespass [that of the first Adam] was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness [that of Jesus, the second or final Adam] was justification that brings life for all men” (v. 18).

Jesus has not simply done something for us, He has done something with us by including us in His life, death, resurrection and ascension.

Therefore, we understand from Scripture that...

- When Jesus died, all humanity died with Him.
- When Jesus rose, all humanity rose to new life with Him.
- When Jesus ascended, all humanity ascended and became seated with Him at the Father’s side.³

When people become believers, they begin to know Christ and enjoy their relationship with Him.

Salvation is recreation

The miracle of the Incarnation is not something that happened “once upon a time,” now past. It changed how the entire cosmos is “wired”—it is a new creation.⁴ The Incarnation changed everything forever, reaching back to all human history, and reaching forward to encompass all time as it unfolds.

Paul speaks of this transformation in Romans 7:4, where he says that even while we are alive, we are already dead to the law by the body of Christ. Jesus’ death in human flesh for us, though a historic event, is a present reality that applies to all humanity (past,

present and future). “You died,” Paul says to the Colossians, “and your life is hid with Christ in God.”⁵ Even before we literally die, therefore, we are already dead in Jesus’ death and alive in Jesus’ resurrection.

Our union with Christ in His life, death, resurrection and ascension is expressed in Ephesians 2:5–6. Here Paul asserts that just as we are dead already in the mystery of Jesus’ substitutionary death, we have also already been “made alive together with Him” and we are “raised up together with Him” and “seated together with Him in the heavenly realms.” All this comes from God’s grace.

God’s union with humanity in Christ includes every human being, even those who lived before Jesus came.

The faith of Christ

What does it mean to be saved by grace through faith? Does it mean that we are saved by something that we do, a human work of faith? If it is, what happens to us when our faith is weak or fails? The good news is that Jesus has done everything necessary for our salvation from start to finish, including believing for us. David Torrance writes:

We are saved by Christ’s faith and obedience to the Father, not ours. My brother Tom [Torrance] often quoted Gal. 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Such is the wording of the KJV, which I believe is a correct translation of the Greek....

Other translators, like those of the New International Version, apparently because they found it so difficult to believe we can live by Christ’s faith rather than our faith, have altered the text to make it read, “I live by faith in the Son of God”—something altogether different! That translation takes away from the vicarious nature of Christ’s life of faith. It is by His faith [not ours] that we are saved and live! Our faith is a thankful response to His faith.

When we look back along our lives and ponder how disobedient we at times have been and continue to be, it is marvelously comforting to know that Christ gives us His life of obedience to the Father and that it is Christ’s obedience which counts. We are saved by His obedience, not ours. (*An Introduction to Torrance Theology*, pp. 7–8) □

(Part 3 will appear in the next issue)

*“The good news is that
Jesus has done everything
necessary for our salvation
from start to finish, including
believing for us.”*

¹ Acts 9:5

² 1 Timothy 2:5

³ Ephesians 2:4–6

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17

⁵ Colossians 3:3

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