

THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Feb-Mar 2009

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occupation?

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As if there was no tomorrow...

by
John Halford

I first visited Malaysia nearly forty years ago. Apart from the larger cities, it was still a land of kampongs and rubber plantations. The drive down to Singapore from KL was—well—an adventure.

In the last four decades I have seen Malaysia change, perhaps more than anywhere else I know except China. The progress is almost unbelievable. I realise that, for the younger generations, this is the only world they have ever known, and the thought of it collapsing is just too dreadful to contemplate.

Depression is a good name for the economic situation we may soon be facing. It describes the state of the financial markets, but it also highlights the emotional state that the situation produces.

We've had good times for so long, but it looks like they may be over—at least for a while. The chickens that we were able to wave off into a holding pattern are coming home to roost.

It is causing some of us sensibly to tighten our belts, consolidate our expenses, and face up to the new economic facts of life. But others are taking their belts off altogether, throwing caution to the winds and living as if there is no tomorrow. Already steeped in debt, they are desperately trying to maintain their standard of living. I am not an economist, but it does not take a financial genius to see that this is a formula for disaster—financial and emotional.

Now, I'm not joining the ranks of the doom and gloom prophets who gleefully point out that the 'end of the world is near'. It probably isn't. But it does look as if a way of life that we have all become used to is threatened, and many of us are simply not prepared to go without.

This is, however, an opportunity for those who say they believe Jesus to show the world what that means. Jesus told us that God, through Him, has opened up the way for all human beings to fulfil their true destiny. That destiny is to live for ever, in peace and happiness. And with that in mind, Jesus showed us another way of living, that allows all who trust Him to see beyond the problems of the moment.

If Jesus' message was understood and believed, it would alter the priorities of every person, every institution and every nation on earth. It would alter the way we think about ourselves and each other. It would

show how pointless the vanity, jealousy, greed and selfishness that mark our lives really are.

It would compel us to recognise that no life is worthless; no human being should be discounted. No nation should be left to starve while others have abundance. No leader could desire to enhance his wealth at the expense of those he should serve. And no one could seriously consider going to war as a solution—to *anything*. To spend any money on weapons of aggression while people are living in poverty would be considered a crime against humanity.

This scenario is not the gospel, but it is the consequences of believing it. You can't expect people who don't believe it to live that way. But those of us who say we understand the way of life that Jesus taught should have a different perspective and priorities, allowing us to live in a way that rises above the

immediate crises of the times.

That way of life has nothing to do with fighting over doctrinal differences, arguing about petty details of style and worship. This is a time for Christian churches to celebrate what they have in common, not to focus on things most people don't really care about. Jesus often refused to be drawn into a public argument. Shouldn't that tell us something?

Meanwhile, millions of people are—or soon will be—facing

financial, emotional and spiritual distress. It is times like this that should motivate all who claim to believe in Jesus to lay aside their differences, and work together to help.

Saint Paul, as usual, puts it well:

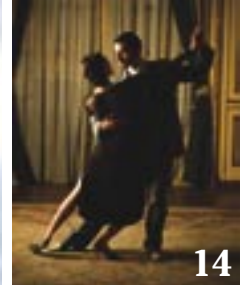
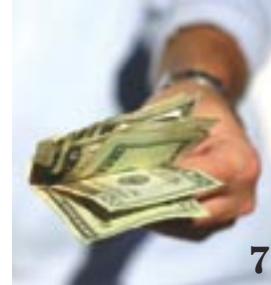
If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—then do me a favour: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. (Philippians 2:1–4 Message Bible)

That is what this magazine, which strives to be a balanced Christian voice in a multicultural society, intends to do as long as our resources permit. □



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What our readers say:

I am very happy to read your magazine. It provides knowledge about God. It gives me strength. As I am a refugee who fled from Myanmar due to religious persecution, I do enjoy reading the articles very much. I sat and read in my room with a free will. I received the Dec-Jan 2008 magazine from my friend. I thank God and my friend that I have found the best Christian magazine in my life. I thank all the co-workers for their commitment, through them I am blessed. I would like to subscribe to THE PLAIN TRUTH magazine. I would like to receive all the previous issues as many as you can send as well as future issues. May God bless you as you serve others like me who could not get to Christian College to study and learn the word of God.

James Khai Pu
Kuala Lumpur

THE PLAIN TRUTH covers current events that are not only interesting, but sometimes thought-provoking. The style of presentation is pleasant and I feel there is a sense of belonging and association between us.

Lawrence Spitzig
Kuala Lumpur

Though not a Christian, I find your magazine useful, as I see the similarities of the basics of human values in all scriptures and this provides a good basis for comparative studies in religions. Thank you. Please continue sending.

MK Khalsa
Kuala Lumpur

THE PLAIN TRUTH articles have changed my life for the better than before and my children also follow some of the advice written in the articles.

Thevarani
Sungai Petani

THE PLAIN TRUTH addresses the issues of the day in a very practical and pragmatic way and provides us hope even in the most depressing issues.

Ng Kam Weng
Subang Jaya

Through THE PLAIN TRUTH articles I come to know more about life in Christ. Furthermore, on the whole, I found that most of the articles have been a good guide for my life. Thank you for the valuable magazine.

Chai Nyien Kong
Bau

THE PLAIN TRUTH guides me to become a better and accountable citizen.

Anonymous

Thank you for sending me such a quality magazine for free even in these financially difficult times. Sure it



costs money to print and distribute each issue. We like to thank all the generous souls who willingly support this work so that many will come to know the truth and be blessed. God bless their generosity.

Paul
Damansara Utama

The Plain Truth has been an enriching magazine for my spiritual life.

Karen TYM
Seremban

THE PLAIN TRUTH is inspiring and thought-provoking and helps me keep an open mind and be receptive to events of the world.

Goh Sok Phang
Singapore

Many thanks for THE PLAIN TRUTH. I find that there are a lot of interesting articles and it gives me information from all over the world and biblical knowledge also. I admire the cover of your magazine. Keep it up.

Mary Voon
Sungai Ara

THE PLAIN TRUTH is topical, refreshing and makes me think.

G W Smith
Singapore

The articles are very relevant to my daily life. Truly THE PLAIN TRUTH enriches my life and soul.

Paul s/o Velanganny
Batu Gajah

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH useful because it helps me overcome my stress in my daily activities.

Rosa Martin
Penampang

Please cancel my subscription to THE PLAIN TRUTH magazine. The reason for the cancellation has nothing to do with the quality of the magazine. It is very well written and informative.

Ng Si Seng
Puchong

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.

Christmas light

Brilliant displays of light and colour are part and parcel with the Advent season. For some people, such displays may be little more than another advertising gimmick of modern retailers. But for believers, they can be another reminder of the glory of the One and Only Son of God, the light of the world, who brings the peace and rest for which the whole world aches and pines.

In the days when Jesus was born in Bethlehem more than 2,000 years ago, there was a devout old man called Simeon living in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die before

he had seen the Lord's Christ. One day the Spirit led Simeon into the temple courts—the very day that Jesus' parents brought in the infant Jesus to fulfil the requirements of Torah. When Simeon saw the baby, he took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."¹

Light to the Gentiles

Simeon praised God for what the scribes, the Pharisees, the chief priests and the teachers of the law could not comprehend: Israel's Messiah was not for the salvation of Israel only, but also for the salvation of all peoples of the world. Isaiah had prophesied it long before: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."²



by
**Michael
Feazell**

Jesus: the new Israel

The Israelites were the people of God. God had called them out from among the nations and set them apart through a covenant as His own special people. And He did it not merely for them, but for the eventual salvation of all nations.³ Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles, but their light had gone out. They had failed to keep the covenant. But God is faithful to His covenant regardless of the faithlessness of His covenant people.⁴ So, in the fullness of times, God sent His own Son to be the light of the world. He was the perfect Israelite, who perfectly kept the covenant as the new Israel.⁵ As the prophesied

Messiah, the perfect representative of the covenant people and the true light to the Gentiles, Jesus delivered both Israel and the nations from sin and reconciled them to God.

Through faith in Christ, giving our allegiance to Him and becoming identified with Him, we become members of the faithful covenant community, the people of God.⁶

Righteous in Christ

We cannot muster righteousness on our own. Only as we are identified with Christ the Saviour are we counted as righteous. We are sinners, no more righteous

in ourselves than Israel was. Only when we see our sinfulness and put our faith in the One through whom God justifies the wicked can we be counted as righteous for His sake.⁷

The church needs the grace of God as much as Israel does. All who put their faith in Christ, Gentile and Jew alike, are saved only because *God* is faithful and good, not because we have been faithful, or because we have found some secret formula, some "right" doctrine or the "right" church. "He has rescued us," Paul wrote in



Colossians 1:13, “from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Trust in Jesus

As easy as it might sound, it is hard to trust in Jesus. Trusting in Jesus means putting your life in His hands, and that means giving up control over your life. That is not easy to do. We like to be in control of our own lives. We like to call the shots, make our own decisions and do things our own way.

King Ahaz of Judah was no exception. Ahaz rejected the sign God gave him for deliverance, for salvation, for peace. He had his own plans about how best to save the nation.⁸

God has a long-range plan for our deliverance and security, but He has a short-range plan. But, like Ahaz, we cannot receive the fruit of His plans if we do not stand firm in faith.

Some people, like King Ahaz, stand firm in military might. Others stand firm in financial security, in their personal integrity or their personal reputation. Some stand firm in their skill or their strength, their ingenuity, deal-making or intelligence. None of these things is

bad or sinful in themselves, of course. But as human beings we are inclined to put our confidence, energy and devotion into them instead of in the real source of security and safety and peace.

Walking humbly

When we commit to God our problems, along with the positive action we take in dealing with them, and trust in His care, provision and deliverance, He promises to be with us.

James wrote, “Humble yourselves before the Lord.”⁹ God calls us to put aside our lifelong crusade to defend ourselves, promote ourselves, preserve our possessions, protect our reputations and prolong our lives. God is our provider, our defender, our hope and our destiny.

The illusion that we can get our own lives under

control must be exposed to the light, to Jesus, “the light of the world.”¹⁰ Then we can rise in Him, becoming who we really are—God’s own precious children whom He saves and helps, whose battles He fights,

whose fears He calms, whose pain He shares, whose future He secures and whose reputation He preserves. “If we walk in the light, as He [God] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.”¹¹ In giving up all, we gain everything. In kneeling, we rise. In setting aside our illusion of personal control, we are clothed with all the glory and splendour and riches of the heavenly eternal realm.

“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you,”¹² Peter wrote. What oppresses you? Your sins? An enemy? A financial disaster? A crushing disease? An inconceivable loss? An impossible situation that you are utterly helpless to do anything about? A disastrous and painful relationship? A blackening of your name? False accusations? God has sent His Son, and through His Son, He takes our hands and lifts us up and shines the light of His glory into the dark and



painful crisis we are enduring.

Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we are not afraid, because He is with us.

God has given us the sign that His rescue is certain: “Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.”¹³

Everywhere we look during this season, it seems, there is decorative lighting—white lights and coloured lights and lit candles. In these physical lights we can enjoy a dim reflection of “the true light that gives light to every man.”¹⁴

“In these decorative lights we can enjoy a dim reflection of the true light, Jesus Christ.” □

¹ Luke 2:29–32

² Isaiah 49:6; 42:6–7

³ Isaiah 49:6

⁴ Romans 3:3–4

⁵ Romans 5:18–26

⁶ Romans 3:27–30

⁷ Romans 4:16, 22–25

⁸ Isaiah 7:1–17

⁹ James 4:10

¹⁰ John 8:12

¹¹ 1 John 1:7

¹² 1 Peter 5:7

¹³ Luke 2:11

¹⁴ John 1:9

Giving is a win-win opportunity

Some people seem to have it all together, with successful career, radiant health, pleasing appearance, happy family life, and a reputation as a good person. A famous actor who lived a full life and was known for his generosity was asked what his secret was. He responded, "What I do for others is more important than what I do for myself."

Jesus said basically the same thing. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."¹

Jesus' example

When we think about Jesus' ministry we note that He went about doing good, reaching out to beggars, lepers, social outcasts, the deaf and blind, and the mentally ill. He ignored no one in need. He wasn't "too busy" to stop and listen to someone's plea for help. Scripture admonishes us to follow His steps, "to be ready to do whatever is good."² We can't raise the dead or cause dramatic healings as He did, but we can give as we are able.

You have something to give

All around us are hurting people—the sick, the hungry, the lonely, the widows, the troubled, the poor, and those who do not yet understand the good news of forgiveness and everlasting life through Jesus Christ. We may not be wealthy, but each of us can use our time, our abilities, or our money to make someone else's life a little better. And we don't have to give in spectacular ways. Mother Teresa noted, "We can do no great things, only little things with great love." People not only need the gospel, but they need food, clothing, and encouragement.



by
Paul Hailey

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow noted, "No man is so poor as to have nothing worth giving; as well might the mountain streamlets say they have nothing to give the sea because they are not rivers. Give what you have. To someone it may be better than you dare to think."

Jesus spoke often of wealth and how we should use it. He warned against trusting in riches to see us through hard times, or viewing riches as proof that we are special in God's eyes.

Giving doesn't come naturally. Our normal inclination is to get, to accumulate, to stockpile stuff. In one of Jesus' parables we learn of a rich man who had much more than he needed, and did not share his goods

with others. Instead, he said to himself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."³ Jesus was not pleased with this attitude. When we can share time, kind words, talent, or treasure with others, we should do so.

Blessings for giving

It pleases God when we give. "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."⁴

The beautiful thing about

giving is that we receive in return. "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."⁵ God gives back to us when we give to others, often through other people. We can't out give God! It may take time, but God returns our good deeds. "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days."⁶

"It is possible to give away and become richer! It is



also possible to hold on too tightly and lose everything. Yes, the liberal man shall be rich! By watering others, he waters himself.”⁷

Good things come to us when we give to others, not necessarily wealth, but many generous people do prosper financially. John Bunyan put it this way, “A man there was and they called him mad; the more he gave the more he had.”

It is interesting too, that brainy brain scientists who have analysed the workings of the human brain have discovered that when we do good to others, the pleasure portion of our brain becomes energised. We actually feel better! “Happy is the generous man, the one who feeds the poor.”⁸

Jesus told His disciples when we visit the sick or those in prison, or provide food or other physical needs, He considers it the same as doing it for Him.⁹ Jesus will not forget your good deeds, He will reward you. Do you want to do something for the Lord? Reach out to those in need!

The blessings that come from God are more valuable than just physical blessings. Many of His blessings lie in the future. Jesus spoke of laying up “treasure in heaven” by sharing our time, abilities, and wealth with others.¹⁰ Even giving a glass of water to someone

is noticed by the Almighty. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in My name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.”¹¹

Better than win-win

When we give something to someone that benefits that person we also please God, and we benefit ourselves as well. That sounds like win-win-win to me! Let’s make giving a way of life. Pray for opportunities to do so. I’ve made it a part of my prayers to ask God to show me how He would like me to use my time and means to serve Him during that day. When we pray for opportunities to give, He will make them available to us.

Paul encouraged the Christians in Colosse to be “fruitful in every good work.”¹² May you too be fruitful in every good work! God who Himself is the giver of every good gift¹³ will bless you here and now and in the future. □

- ¹ Acts 20:35
- ² Titus 3:1
- ³ Luke 12:16–21
- ⁴ Hebrews 13:16
- ⁵ Luke 6:38
- ⁶ Ecclesiastes 11:1
- ⁷ Proverbs 11:24–25
- ⁸ Proverbs 22:9
- ⁹ Matthew 25:34–40
- ¹⁰ Matthew 6:19–20
- ¹¹ Mark 9:41
- ¹² Colossians 1:10
- ¹³ James 1:17

Lunch basket extraordinaire

Matthew 14:13–21; John 6:1–15

The bread was still hot, fresh from the hearth. I had just milled the flour the day before, then prepared dough and baked it early that morning. Soon after, my husband ran into our house instructing us to get dressed and pack a quick lunch, because he had heard that Jesus’ boat was about to land on the lakeshore near our village. I grabbed some of the bread and some dried fish and put them in a basket.

I wasn’t entirely prepared to spend the day listening to a rabbi. And when I realised we had to walk a distance, to a remote mountainside, I was even less enthusiastic. Besides, most religious leaders intimidated me with their superior ways and nitpicking. I wasn’t in the mood to be berated. But, not having any choice, I picked up our lunch and took my son by the hand, dutifully following my husband as we scurried along the shore and up the hillside.

Thousands had gathered in a grassy area. Some were blind, some lame with twisted bodies. There were lepers, beggars, destitute individuals who felt rejected and used. The restless crowd seemed to cry out for healing and mercy. The sights, sounds and smells were overwhelming. I felt uneasy and hid behind my husband, tightly holding on to my son.

But as the day progressed and Jesus walked through the throngs of people, I watched in amazement as He compassionately touched the faces of the ill and healed them. He pulled a restored lame man to his feet and danced in joyful circles with him. He comforted

by
**Joyce
Catherwood**

those who mourned, beckoning the weary and heavy-laden to come to Him. Desperate people, whose dreams had long since dried up, found fresh hope in His open arms.

A calm finally settled over the multitude; then the healer began to teach us, breathing new life into our hearts and minds. The day went by in a flash. As evening approached, Jesus realised the people were hungry and word quickly spread that food was needed. Our basket still contained five loaves and two fish. We had been standing close by, so I gave the basket to my son and gently pushed him toward Jesus and His disciples. The disciple Andrew expressed doubts whether this meager food offering would be of any help. But when my little boy presented the basket to Jesus, He bent down and with a huge grin told him this was exactly what He needed. My son ran back to us, proud as he could be.

Jesus looked up toward heaven, gave thanks and began to break the bread and divide the fish, giving portions to His disciples. They then divided those pieces and passed them down the rows of people. The supply never ran out. And there were even leftovers! I returned home on a high, regretting my earlier reluctance to come. Jesus turned my homemade barley loaves and two small fish into an unforgettable feast that fed and satisfied thousands! □

So, what's your *real* occupation?

Ask any Christian what is his or her occupation and they'll answer from "I'm an engineer", "I am involved in sales", "I teach pre-school children" to "I don't have an occupation; I'm unemployed". When it comes to our vocation, we have a tendency to relate it solely with our jobs—and ignore the bigger picture!

We associate our employment with our occupation because of the amount of time we spend on our jobs. After all, Webster's dictionary defines *occupation* as "what occupies one's time". Spending one third of our daily 24 hours allotment on work is the norm for most workers. Some work up to ten or twelve hours every day including overtime. Workaholics and top executives may even exceed this. In fact, some of us spend more time in the office than we do at home and with our families.

But for the Christians there is another profession that demands more of his or her time than their physical work. It is a 24/7 occupation with no time off. There's no annual leave and no public holidays. Part-time or temporary work is not available. All must work full-time and on a permanent basis. There is no retirement age and resignations are disallowed. Changing of this career is totally forbidden. I am, of course, referring to our Christian calling, which actually should be our first occupation.

A lot of people identify status and position in society by what they do. Who they are as a person is very much determined by what job positions they hold. They derive their roles and functions from their occupations. This is especially true if their jobs are considered by society as prestigious and exclusive. For such workers, their sense of identity is hugely dependent on the type of careers they hold. Many employees, especially breadwinners in families, go into depression on losing their jobs because they associate themselves so much with their work. Losing a job is like losing their identity—who they are. No wonder most of us, including Christians, consider our daily employment as our sole or major occupation.

Christians, however, get their identity not from the work they do (although that is important) but from God. The Bible tells us that we are God's children, heirs

by
**Wong
Teck Kong**

of God. We are His chosen people, set apart by God.¹ Whether we get promoted, demoted or retrenched, the occupation of a Christian remains the same. Regardless of our position in the organisation chart, the top-notch CEO and the humble gardener have the same occupation in God's sight. Dare we think any differently?

A third reason why we link our jobs with our occupation is that our income is sourced from our work. The salaries from our employment bring home the bacon that sustains our families and us. To have an occupation means to have money, an income or financial security. So, since what we do bring us the monetary rewards, what we do must be very important and therefore, surely, that must be our occupation.

Again the Bible says differently. It says that it is God who supplies our every need.² Our first and last employer is actually God who uses human bosses to pay our weekly or monthly salaries. Our physical sustenance is derived from the environment, which is created by God in the first place. That is why in the Old Testament God expected the Israelites to pay Him 10 per cent in tithes because it was He who gave them the 100 per cent originally!³ Whatever talents and skills we possess that enable us to work in the labour market are all gifts from God.⁴

The Bible is very clear about a Christian's occupation. We are co-workers upholding the common 'mission statement' to preach the gospel to the unconverted world.⁵ We are like soldiers, preparing to go to the battlefield to fight the enemy.⁶ Sometimes we are

pictured as runners, racing to finish the race set before us.⁷ Other times we are likened to servants, serving our spiritual master.⁸ No matter what we do to earn our living, all Christians have another job to do and a task to complete which is more important than any other human assignment. We do have an occupation; we are to be about our Father's business.⁹

So, the next time when someone asks you what your occupation is, it would be correct to reply, "Why, I'm a Christian!" □



¹ Romans 8:16–17;

1 Peter 2:9

² Philippians 4:19

³ Malachi 3:8

⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:7

⁵ Matthew 28:
19–20

⁶ 2 Timothy 2:3–4

⁷ Hebrews 12:1–2

⁸ 1 Peter 2:16

⁹ Luke 2:49

We are always

The doctrine of the Trinity has been with us for more than 1,600 years. Most Christians consider it to be one of the “givens” of their faith, and don’t give it much thought. Theologian J.I. Packer noted that the Trinity is usually considered a little-thought-about piece of “theological lumber” that no one pays much attention to.^a

But whatever your level of understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, one thing you can know for sure: The Triune God is unchangeably committed to including you in the wonderful fellowship of the life of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.

Communion

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there are not three Gods, only one, and that God, the only true God, the God of the Bible, is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This has always been a concept that is difficult to put into words. But let’s try. The Father, Son and Spirit, we might say, mutually indwell one another, that is, the life they share is perfectly interpenetrating. In other words, there is no such thing as the Father apart from the Son and the Spirit. There is no such thing as the Son apart from the Father and the Spirit. And there is no Holy Spirit apart from the Father and the Son.

That means that when you are in Christ, you are included in the fellowship and joy of the life of the Triune God. It means the Father receives you and has fellowship with you as He does with Jesus. It means that the love that God once and for all demonstrated in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is no less than the love the Father has always had for you even before you were a believer and always will have for you.

It means that God has declared in Christ that you belong to Him, that you are included, that you matter. That’s why the Christian life is all about love, God’s love for you and God’s love in you.

God did not make us to be alone. To be created in God’s image, as the Bible says humanity is¹, is to be created for loving relationships, for communion with God and with one another. The late systematic



by
Joseph Tkach

theologian Colin Gunton put it this way: “God is already ‘in advance’ of creation, a communion of persons existing in loving relations.”^b

Mutual indwelling

This union/communion of Father, Son and Spirit was referred to as *perichoresis* by the early Greek fathers of the church. They used the word in the sense of *mutual indwelling*.^c

Why does this matter? Because it is that very inner life of love in the Triune God that God shares with *us* in Jesus Christ.

Theologian Michael Jinkins describes it this way: “Through the self-giving of Jesus Christ, through God’s

self-emptying assumption of our humanity, God shares God’s own inner life and being in communion with us, uniting us to Himself by the Word through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus the God who is Love brings us into a real participation in the eternal life of God.”^d

Too “theological” sounding? Let’s make it simpler. Just as Paul told the pagans at Athens, in God we all “live and move and have our being”.² The God in whom we live and move and have our being is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, each existing in the other in perfect communion and love. The Son became human so that we human beings can join Him in that perfect communion of love that He shares with the Father and the Spirit. All this we learn from God’s own perfect

revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ attested in the Scriptures.

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really knew Me, you would know My Father as well.”³

“Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me?... Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.”⁴

“On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”⁵

“I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You.”⁶

“The wonderful and beautiful fellowship shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit is the very fellowship of love into which our Saviour Jesus places us through His life, death, resurrection and ascension as God in the flesh.”

on His mind

“For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him [Jesus Christ], and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.”⁷

Salvation flows from God’s absolute love for and faithfulness to humanity, not from a desperate attempt to repair the damages of sin. God’s gracious purpose for humanity existed *before* sin ever entered the picture.⁸ God has assured our future—He has, as Jesus said,

the Father, we mortal, sinning human beings, in spite of ourselves, are graciously and lovingly held in the divine embrace of the triune God. That is exactly what the Father intended for us from the beginning. “In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves.”¹²

Redemption starts with God’s nature, His absolute and unquenchable love for humanity, not with human



“been pleased to give you the kingdom.”⁹ Jesus has taken us with Him where He is.¹⁰

God has purposed never to be without us. *All* of us, for “God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.”¹¹ We often forget that. But God never does.

In His embrace

In Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit by the will of

sin. Through the Incarnation of the Son, His becoming one of us and making us one with Him, God includes us human beings in the all-embracing love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father. God made us for this very reason—so that in Christ we can be His beloved children.

This has been God’s will for us from before creation. “For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—to

the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves... And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ...to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ.”¹³

Through the atoning Incarnation of the Son, Jesus Christ, human beings are already forgiven, reconciled and saved in Him. Divine amnesty has been proclaimed for all humanity in Christ. The sin that entered the human experience through Adam cannot hold a candle to the overwhelming flood of God’s grace through Jesus Christ. “Consequently,” the apostle Paul wrote, “just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.”¹⁴

Universal salvation?

So will everyone automatically—perhaps even against their will, enter into the joy of knowing and loving God? Such a thing is actually an oxymoron. That is, it is impossible for you to love someone against your will. God draws all humanity to Himself,¹⁵ but He does not force anyone to come. God wants everyone to come to faith,¹⁶ but He does not force anyone. God loves every person,¹⁷ but He doesn’t force anyone to love Him—love has to be voluntary, freely given, or it is not love.

Contrary to the idea of universal salvation, only those who trust Jesus are able to love Him and experience the joy of His salvation. Those who don’t trust Him, who refuse His forgiveness or the salvation He has already won for them, whether because they don’t want it or simply because they don’t care, can’t love Him and enjoy fellowship with Him. For those who consider God their enemy, God’s constant love for them is a grossly aggravating intrusion. The more they are confronted with His love, the more they hate Him. For those who hate God, life in God’s world is hell.

As C.S. Lewis put it, “The damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside.”^e Or as Robert Capon explained: “There is no sin you can commit that God in Jesus hasn’t forgiven already. The only way you can get yourself into permanent Dutch [trouble] is to refuse forgiveness. *That’s* hell.”^f

Always on His mind

The doctrine of the Trinity is far more than just a creed to be recited or words printed on a statement of faith. The central biblical truth that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit actually shapes our faith and our lives as Christians. The wonderful and beautiful fellowship shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit is the very fellowship of love into which our Saviour Jesus places us through His life, death, resurrection and ascension

as God in the flesh.¹⁸

From before all time the Triune God determined to bring humanity into the indescribable life and fellowship and joy that Father, Son and Holy Spirit share together as the one true God.¹⁹ In Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, we have been made right with the Father, and in Jesus we are included in the fellowship and joy of the shared life of the Trinity.²⁰ The church is made up of those who have already

come to faith in Christ. But redemption applies to all.²¹ The gap has been bridged. The price has been paid. The way is open for the human race—like the prodigal son in the parable—to come home.

Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension are proof of the total and unwavering devotion of the Father to His loving purpose of including humanity in the joy and fellowship of the life of the Trinity. Jesus is the proof that the Father will never abandon us. In Jesus, the Father has adopted us and made us His beloved children, and He will never forsake His plans for us.

When we trust Jesus to be our all in all, it is not an empty trust. He *is* our all in all. In Him, our sins are forgiven, our hearts are made new, and we are included in the life He shares with the Father and the Spirit.

Salvation is the direct result of the Father’s ever-faithful love and power, proven incontrovertibly through Jesus Christ and ministered to us by the Holy Spirit. It’s not our faith that saves us. It’s God alone—Father, Son and Spirit—who saves us. And God gives us faith as a gift to open our eyes to the truth of who He is—and who we are, as His beloved children.

God’s eternal and almighty word of love and inclusion for you will never be silenced.²² You belong to Him, and nothing in heaven or Earth can ever change that. □

“Salvation flows from
God’s absolute love,
not from a desperate
attempt to repair the
damages of sin.”

¹ Genesis 1:27

² Acts 17:28

³ John 14:6–7

⁴ John 14:10–11

⁵ John 14:20

⁶ John 17:20–21

⁷ Colossians 1:19–20

⁸ Ephesians 1:4

⁹ Luke 12:32

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:6

¹¹ Colossians 1:19–20

¹² Ephesians 1:5–6

¹³ Ephesians 1:4–6, 9–10

¹⁴ Romans 5:18

¹⁵ John 12:32

¹⁶ 1 Timothy 2:4

¹⁷ John 3:16

¹⁸ John 16:27; 1 John 1:2–3

¹⁹ Ephesians 1:4–10

²⁰ Ephesians 4:2–6

²¹ 1 John 2:1–2

²² Romans 8:32, 38–39

References

^a Packer, James. (1988) *God’s Words*. Baker, p.44.

^b Gunton, Colin. (1998) *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*. Eerdmans, p.9.

^c Other theological terms that describe this inner communion of the Father, Son and Spirit are *coinherence*, each existing within the other and *circumincessio* (the Latin equivalent of *perichoresis*).

^d Jinkins, Michael. (2001) *Invitation to Theology*. Intervarsity, p.92.

^e Lewis, C.S. (1962) *The Problem of Pain*. Collier, p.127.

^f Capon, Robert. (1993) *The Mystery of Christ*. Eerdmans, p.10.

The ultimate game of *Clue*

The butler in the dining room with a wrench!
Colonel Mustard in the kitchen with a candlestick!
Most people will recognise these phrases from the game of *Clue*. For those not familiar with *Clue*, it's a board game where the players receive clues about a crime and the first one to solve it wins.

Mysteries are fun, whether in books, movies or games. I enjoy the twists and turns of a good whodunnit, though I'm not too good at solving them. Perhaps you're not a mystery fan. But if you own a Bible, you hold one of the greatest mysteries of all time in your hands. Some of the mysteries are unsolvable, at least for now. For example, we don't know the authors of some parts of the Bible. Answers to many questions about what happens after death must wait.

How the words can be relevant after 2,000 years is a wonder. The Bible is called the living Word—how that is possible is a mystery of the Holy Spirit. And then you have God Himself—He is in many ways unfathomable to us, especially His triune nature.

The Bible does provide clues about many of its mysteries, if you read it with that in mind. I like to look for clues that round out my picture of who God is. Ephesians 2:10 says we are God's masterpiece. Most of us read it thinking of ourselves as a masterpiece. But this is actually a clue about God, telling us He is an artist—an artist with a beautiful piece, who takes delight in His work and has a purpose for it.

Again in Ephesians 5:19, Paul says when the Holy Spirit leads us, we will sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Normally we read this thinking about the singing we do. But this is also a clue about God. He's a musician and He has given us the gift of song, which pleases Him.

We've been given other clues about who God is, and they are all around us in nature. I love to watch the hummingbirds come to the feeders in the morning and evening. They are beautiful creatures, so tiny but so fast, and they buzz all around the yard, chasing each other and chittering loudly. Job tells us God created all the animals, and from the variety we see His imagination, genius and artistry.

David said the heavens declare God's glory. All we have to do is look up in the night sky to believe this. We can see more of God's imagination and creativity through the technology that allows us to see things light years away. Every day I check a website from NASA showing amazing pictures of nebulae, galaxies and constellations. These are yet more clues about our Creator.

In Jesus' prayer in John 17, He said, "This is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth." When we look for clues about who God is, we're not just playing a game, we're experiencing the joys of eternal life by getting to know our wonderful God. ■

by
Tammy Tkach



Come dance

Want to dance? Dancing can be fun, enjoyable and pleasurable, especially if it is accompanied by good music, songs and food. It can be a wonderful experience even if it is only for a short while.

Dances in the Bible

There are many references to dancing in the Bible, some good, some bad. For example, Ancient Israel thanked God for miraculously rescuing them from their slavery in Egypt by singing and dancing.¹ However, they forgot the miracles all too soon. While Moses had gone to the top of Mt. Sinai to receive God's laws, they made a golden calf and danced and worshipped it. God was furious and killed 3,000 people.²

The Bible also mentions another kind of dance—a divine dance—of which very few people are aware. Towards the end of His human ministry, Jesus told His disciples: “I am *in* the Father and the Father is *in* Me.”³ Again, He said: “the Father is *in* me, and I *in* the Father.”⁴ Jesus didn't say He was *with* the Father or the Father was *with* Him. The words “with” and “in” have different meanings as in “the man was *with* his wife” and “the man was *in* his wife”—one refers to physical proximity while the other refers to oneness of heart, mind and soul.

These scriptures describe divine intimacy which exists within the Persons of the Triune God, that is, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is called the divine dance or divine life.⁵ The biblical scholar Athanasius used the Greek word *perichoresis* to refer to this divine dance/life. Let's take a closer look to understand what this term means.

Perichoresis

Perichoresis carries the imagery of a circular or choreographed dance. It is used to describe the internal activity of the Triune God, that is, the interrelationships of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It doesn't refer to a static relationship as “the Son is in the Father, the Father is in the Son, and the Holy Spirit is in the Father and Son.” Rather, it refers to a dynamic relationship—a continual pouring out into one another, eternally giving themselves over into one another. It describes them as mutually indwelling, permeating and interpenetrating one another. It refers to a dynamic



by
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life where each Person *fully* receives and *fully* gives withholding *nothing*. It refers to intimate fellowship, togetherness, openness and oneness. It's unlike any other dance.

God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit

The Bible tells us that there is only one God who exists eternally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus, although God is one, He is also a community of three Persons. The term Triune God or Trinity is used to refer to this one God.

God is one in *essence*. He is indivisible in the sense that the three Persons of God cannot be separated. He is defined by their love relationship with one other. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit work in perfect unity with one mind, one will and one purpose. Their work is inseparable. Everything God does is done by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When one acts, the other

two are also involved. For example, when Jesus healed, the Father and Spirit were also involved, even though the miracle might be attributed to Jesus alone.

The Persons of God are *distinct* and have different functions. The Father is the Creator of all things, but He created through His Son Jesus and by the Holy Spirit. The Son is the Redeemer, but He redeems the creation by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit transforms and reconciles the creation to the Father but through the Son. Thus they have

different functions, but they work in concert as one God.

With this understanding, scriptures such as “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working,”⁶ “I and the Father are one,”⁷ and “I am in the Father and the Father is in me”⁸ become clearer.

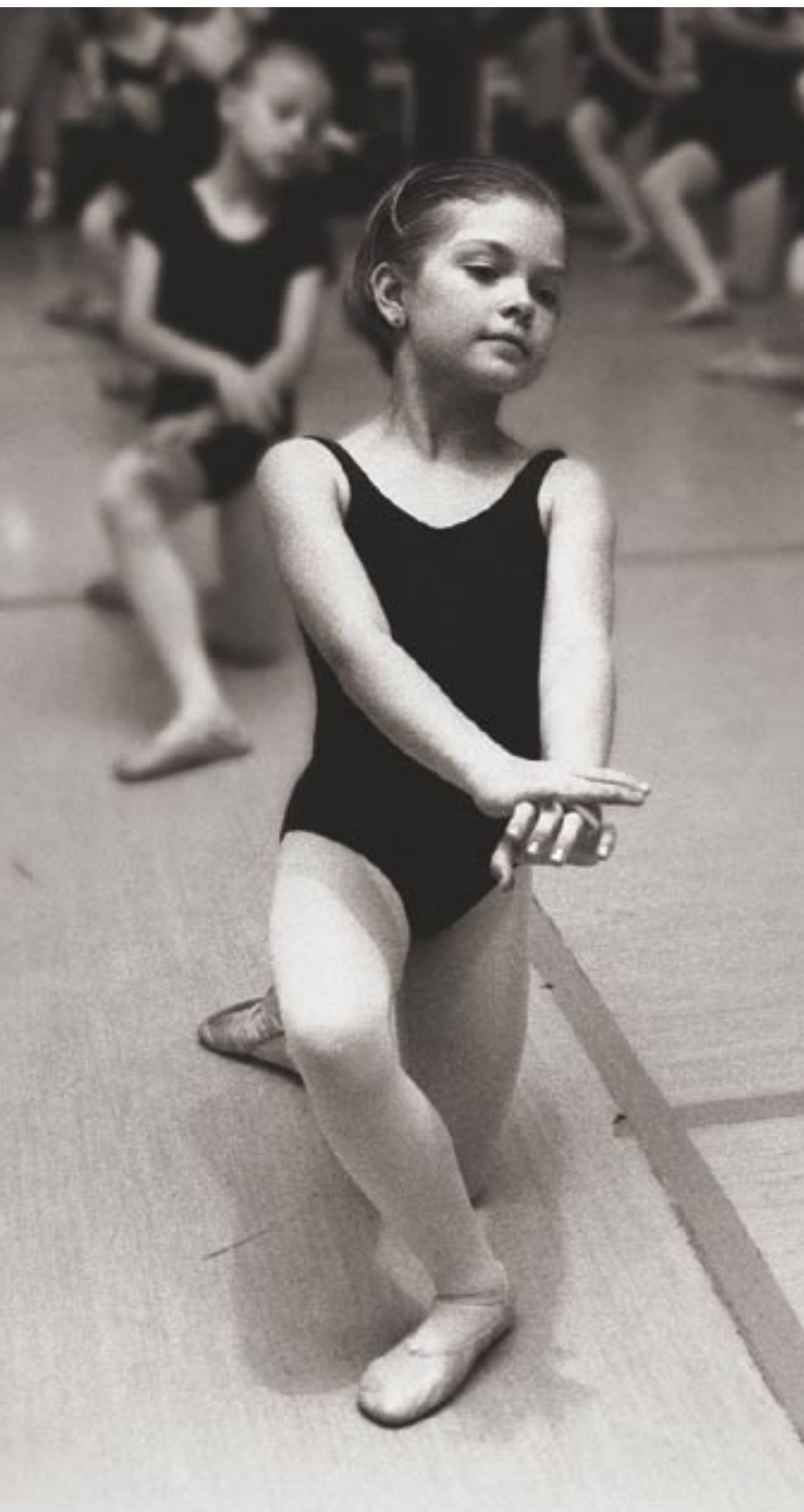
God lacks nothing

God is *transcendent* or God *without* us. This state refers to the internal activity/life that exists within the Triune God, that is, the mutual love relationships of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It describes who God *is*, apart from His creation.

God lacks nothing. He is totally complete and self-sufficient. His life is one of abundance. Everything good, desirable and delightful is in Him. This includes love, intimacy, passion, delight, joy, peace, goodness, glory and excitement. So God doesn't need anyone

*“Although God is complete
and self-sufficient and doesn't
need anyone or anything, it
is nevertheless His will that
we human beings participate
in His divine dance.”*

e with God



(angels or human beings) or anything (such as the physical universe) to add to His joy or pleasure.

So why did God create human beings?

Open dance, open invitation

Although God is transcendent, He is also *immanent* or God *with* us. Jesus was God incarnate. He took the form of a human being. Immanence refers to God's acts with respect to creation, history, salvation, formation of Church, daily lives of believers, etc. It describes what God *does* within His creation.

The divine dance (life) is not a closed one limited to the Persons of God. It is open to human beings. Although God is complete and self-sufficient and doesn't need anyone or anything, it is nevertheless His will that we human beings participate in His divine dance.

God's physical creation in some ways model His divine dance (albeit faintly). For example, the galaxies, solar systems and planets do their orbits as a choreographed dance. They orbit gracefully, without colliding or stampeding on one another. The tiny protons, neutrons and electrons of a stable atom also orbit in an organised manner. The ecosystem with all the flora and fauna also operate interdependently. So are human marriages, families and communities. It appears that God created the physical creation to model His own divine dance.⁹

God is very generous. He wants to share His abundant life with us. Jesus prayed: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be *one*, Father, just as You are *in* Me and I am *in* You. May they also be *in* Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be *one* as We are *one*: I *in* them and You *in* Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent me and have loved them even as You have loved Me. Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know You, I know You, and they know that You have sent Me. I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be *in* them and that I Myself may be *in* them."¹⁰

The Father loves the Son and is preparing a love gift for Jesus. All who love Jesus are the bride of Jesus. The bride, though imperfect now, will be made perfect at the second coming of Jesus. When the bride is united with Jesus, God adopts them as His own beloved sons and daughters. So the bride shares in the intimate Father-Son relationship, not merely a favoured status external to God.

Referring to this spiritual intimacy, St. Paul writes: "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom



His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the *fullness* of God.”¹¹

We experience God’s fullness when we are lifted up by the Spirit into His life of mutual love. God is not just calling us to admire Him from afar but to participate in His divine life.¹² It describes an extraordinary degree of intimacy with God.

Spiritual implications

The divine dance/life conveys several imageries: social, graceful, passionate and ecstatic.

1) As social dance

In the divine dance, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit interact with each other with joy and delight. They live a life of mutual giving and receiving. Their life forbids us to view God as solitary. Rather, it conveys the sense of community. So the idea can be applied to the context of marriage, family or church. For example, the church is to function as a close-knit family, where all members give of themselves to one another. They find their identity not simply in themselves but in each other.¹³

The Father does not just live by Himself. He does not function as an autonomous individual. The Son and the Spirit move, as it were, into the Father. In the same way, the Father and Son exist in the Spirit, and the Father and the Spirit live in the Son. Theirs is a dynamic life, united in love, purpose and work as in: “As soon as Jesus was baptised, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.’”¹⁴

The communal character of Trinity implies that there is a continuous back-and-forth flow of love. The Trinity is a zestful, wondrous community of divine light, love and joy.

The implications for the church are:

(a) Church is a community, so members must interact (fellowship) with one another in mutual love, giving and receiving,

(b) Each member must use his/her unique gift(s) to edify the body and

(c) Only in a community we truly become disciples.

2) As graceful dance

The divine dance is grace-full—Jesus is full of grace. St. John writes “From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another.”¹⁵ He cleansed lepers, cast out demons, ate with sinners and ran to welcome His prodigal son. All these acts reflect God’s full involvement in our lives, not an apathetic, indifferent, lukewarm involvement. Referring to this abundant grace, St. Paul writes:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ... with the riches of God’s grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.”¹⁶

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”¹⁷

“...may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”¹⁸

At the physical level, ever since Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, the world is operating on the principle of scarcity—lack of money, job, shelter, food, etc. This has led to economic, political and social violence. Although believers must still live in this world, God tells them to focus on spiritual abundance.¹⁹ He exhorts them to seek His kingdom and His righteousness first and promises to take care of their needs. St. Paul said that he was contented in whatever state he was in.²⁰

The prophet Isaiah writes “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance.”²¹

The implications for the church are:

(a) We must serve God and serve one another joyfully and whole-heartedly, not apathetically or half-heartedly and

(b) We must learn to be contented. While we may not be rich materially, God declares that we are already rich in Christ.²²

3) As passionate dance

The term passionate implies *self-giving*. God passionately cares for His creation so much that it climaxed in the passion (the suffering) of His Son. He is a *com-passionate* God, one who suffers with the world in its suffering.

God’s suffering in Christ doesn’t mean that He is weak or powerless. It is on the cross Jesus became King. It is on the cross He disarmed principalities and powers. The Lamb gained victory by shedding its blood.²³ It is the self-giving love that led to Christ’s death on the cross. Several scriptures talk about God’s passionate, self-giving character:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”²⁴

“He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?”²⁵

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”²⁶

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”²⁷

The implications for the church are:

(a) We must be prepared to endure shame, humiliation and persecution for the sake of God’s kingdom. St. Paul writes: “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him.”²⁸

(b) We must stop all boasting, self-serving and domineering attitudes in the home, office or church. St. Paul writes: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”²⁹

4) As ecstatic dance

The term ecstasy is used for the Spirit. It means *standing outside oneself*. God has freely chosen to open the dance to involve all creation. God wants to draw the world into Himself and lead us to the climax of bliss, ecstasy. St. John writes “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”³⁰

The implications for the church are:

(a) We must not keep the gospel to ourselves; we must share it with the world and

(b) We must joyfully welcome new people into the church community.

Come dance

God’s divine dance pictures His abundant life. We enter into this life when we accept Jesus as our personal Saviour. The Lord’s Supper or communion we take during Easter portrays this shared life with God. We share with Jesus all the excellent things which are in Him.

God is drawing humanity into Himself. That’s why Jesus prayed to the Father “The love You have for Me will be in them.” He is inviting you to participate in His wonderful, never-ending divine dance. Everything is ready.³¹ The floor is open. He has given you all the steps and is inviting you *personally*. So come dance with God and with fellow believers gracefully, passionately and ecstatically. □

¹ Exodus 15

² Exodus 32

³ John 14:11

⁴ John 10:38

⁵ 2 Peter 1:4

⁶ John 5:17

⁷ John 10:30

⁸ John 14:11

⁹ Romans 1:20

¹⁰ John 17:21–26

¹¹ Ephesians 3: 14–19

¹² 2 Peter 1:4

¹³ John 17:21–23

¹⁴ Matthew 3: 16–17

¹⁵ John 1:16

¹⁶ Ephesians 1: 3–10

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 9:8

¹⁸ Ephesians 3: 18–19

¹⁹ Colossians 3: 1–2

²⁰ Philippians 4: 10–13

²¹ Isaiah 55:1–2

²² Revelation 2:9

²³ Revelation 5:6

²⁴ John 3:16

²⁵ Romans 8:32

²⁶ Hebrews 12:2

²⁷ Philippians 2: 5–8

²⁸ Philippians 1:29

²⁹ Philippians 2: 3–4

³⁰ Revelation 7: 9–10

³¹ Matthew 22: 1–14, Luke 15: 24

Resolutions & new beginnings

I sat in frustration one night while reviewing some of the resolutions I made for the New Year. Another year has passed but here I am still figuring out whether I had done anything at all or had exerted any effort to make these resolutions come true. What about you? Have you made any resolutions at all for the coming year. Do you resolve to succeed and do better this year than in the previous year? Have you made any plans to achieve this goal?

I recall one interesting discussion we had not very long ago with a taxi driver on our way home from worship service. He joined in and volunteered some information about himself and his family. When asked about his children, he proudly showed their pictures

by
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Manlulu**

all these through driving since this is the only job he can do well. He has not stopped saving from his daily wages even up to this time.

Mang Mike is a happy and contented man, maybe because he has simple needs and he has made good his commitment or resolutions in life.

Every new year is a year of renewal, a new beginning, a time to change things that need to be changed, a time to improve on things and a time to leave the past behind and start all over again. These are resolutions we make during this time of the year. To us Christians, resolutions are commitments we make to walk in greater harmony with the Lord by His grace. Like Mang Mike, we have to work on them before we can succeed.



neatly kept in a special compartment of his wallet. He said they are all college degree holders and are now working at reputable government and private agencies. Education, he believes, is the only inheritance he can give to his children to enable them to have a better life and be more productive than he is. It was not easy, according to him, but he resolved to succeed through guts, sweat and tears and with the help of God.

Mang Mike, the driver, made a resolution thirty five years ago to save a certain amount from his income as a driver every day. He made this promise to himself to prove to his future wife that he could support her and their future children. After a long courtship of ten years, he won her love and gifted her with all his savings as he promised. He proudly added that he did

The following pointers could help you to succeed and make your resolutions work.

Make a detailed list of your resolutions

A detailed list of your resolutions will serve as a reminder of your commitment to yourself. This list will also help you to review them as months pass so that you can update them from time to time.

Make these resolutions a part of your daily prayer

They say that it takes 21 days to form a habit. Resolve to make your resolutions work by incorporating them in your daily life until it becomes a habit to you. With God's help, this habit will bear good fruits in the future.

(continues on page 20)

Having the last say

Actor Roger Moore, former James Bond, was asked in an interview: “Who makes all the decisions in your family?” In his inimitable style, he said: “My wife does, but I always have the last say. I say, ‘Yes, dear!’ ” This joke has never failed to give us a hearty laugh. However, there is no humour when our last say has a negative slant.

When I was younger, I thought that having the last say, telling people like it is, being witty with wisecracks was my gift to mankind. Always pointing people to the right path, enlightening them on my ‘gospel truth’, putting people in their place, and even correcting them was my divine anointing.

How wrong I was. I later regretted the hurt and offence I caused others. Telling jokes or speaking ‘words of wisdom’ without the slightest thought of the

by
Ben David

relationships when we habitually speak unwise words that could irritate, hurt, and offend others.

The know-it-all

Some people view the knowledge they have as all encompassing that gives them the right to express their views on anything and everything, including the right to correct other people. Showing off our knowledge and continuously stating our views as if they are the only authorised version reduces the impact we could have in other people’s lives. We may feel compelled to have the last comment. Our intentions may even seem harmless. It is natural to want people to take notice of our comments or knowledge. Still, when our words miss the mark, it defeats our noble intentions of helping others.



negative effects on others is very different from being an enlightened one.

Tasteful jokes can brighten up conversations and humour is said to be good for health. The way we use words may sometimes serve to put ourselves in a better light. However, sarcasm that works as a weapon to cut people down to size is a negative example, even if we sometimes pass it off as rhetoric.

Wisecracker

Adding wisecracks in conversations to show ‘the missing dimension’ may make us appear smart. But being smart need not necessarily make us a more endearing person. People tolerate wisecrackers for a time, but eventually wisecracks can drain listeners, mentally and emotionally. Cracks can appear in human

‘People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care’ is a well-known saying. Displaying our knowledge without meeting others’ needs fails to impress.¹

Genuine care and concern should then be translated into practical actions, and not be limited to knowledgeable words alone. Instead of making light of others, and putting them in a less-than-perfect light, we could learn how to make better use of our tongue.

Learning restraint

Learning to rightly control our tongues paves the way for us to interact with others in a constructive way. When we are tempted to be free with our words, go quickly into a prayerful attitude. Ask God to help us put
(continues on page 20)

(continued from page 18)

Review and update your resolutions from time to time

Sometimes things and situations change as the months pass. You need to keep on reviewing and updating your resolutions in order to fit your present status. You will realise that doing so enables you to admit that some of them are not attainable at the moment or in the near future. You need more preparation to help you fulfil them. This is the time to revise them to meet your current needs or situation.

Congratulate yourself after each small achievement

According to Alexander Dumas, *“Resolutions are like eels... easy to catch, but hard to hang on to.”* This is the reason why you need to give incentives to yourself for every little success you attain. Glory belongs to God but it is not wrong to rejoice with every success we have along the way. This serves as an encouragement to go on until you are able to meet all of the successes you desire. As long as you do not forget to glorify God in the process and you are doing your part, God will bless your effort. God wants us to enjoy the fruits of our labour.

Be realistic and accept failure from time to time

We sometimes make unrealistic commitments or commitments which spell failure from the beginning simply because we do not have the immediate resources to keep them or to attain them. When making resolutions, consider the resources you have now and make projections about your future resources. This process will eliminate or reduce the possibility of failure. It is not wrong to aim high or to dream of better things. After all God's power has no limits. However, there is wisdom in being realistic while praying that God will intervene to give us what is best for us and

what we can handle.

Failure can give lessons in building character

Sometimes, we need trials to develop character. Expect to fail along the way, but don't give up. This is part of a Christian's life. We have our ups and downs, our hills and valleys with some plateaux on our way to God's kingdom. Don't despair because we need to fail sometimes to learn lessons in character. When we fail we get closer to God knowing that we can draw strength from Him who gives us life. Don't stop when you fail. Continue until you succeed. You will!

The year 2009 should give us hope for a better future under the new covenant. This is a year of resolutions. Dusk has fallen on the old year taking all of our failures, frustrations, and disappointments with it. This year has dawned on us. Let us consider this as a new beginning offered by God in Jesus Christ especially for those who have not responded in faith to His call. God offers them the opportunity, a chance to start all over again.

There is a new life in Jesus Christ. Accept Jesus Christ and resolve to live a life according to God's way. Then your life will have a definite meaning and purpose, a life of permanent value because it is a life fully devoted to serving God.

As we look forward to the second coming of our Lord and Saviour, our faith in Him who died for our sins so that we may be reconciled to God will sustain us as we walk the Christian walk. His second coming also marks a new beginning for the entire world, a new hope, the dawning of a new era for God's creation.

God gives His people a precious opportunity for a new beginning in Jesus Christ as we all respond to His call. Resolve to take this chance and live a full and enriched life in Jesus Christ! □

(continued from page 19)

a 'brake' on our tongue and for His inspiration to say words that edify and build others.

Weighing our words carefully helps us to differentiate what words may (or may not) contribute to the listener's well-being. The well-known saying: 'Think before you speak' could well do with a slight amendment: 'Think prayerfully and meditatively before you speak'. In this way, our words would work to bear goodwill with our listeners, even with our unfriendly foes.² A controlled tongue is therefore the hallmark of one's maturity.

Learning economy of words

Love for others displaces any need to steal the limelight with our many words. Proverbs 10:19 says: "When words are many, sin is not absent but he who holds his tongue is wise." A wise and loving person therefore speaks frugally with words of significance that may perhaps change the destiny of the hearer towards greater things in life. One who doesn't know when to turn off the flow is likely to stray into areas of slandering, sarcasm and putting people down, thereby sinning against God.

Learning to listen

When we talk too much and listen too little, we

communicate to others that our ideas are much more important than theirs. Saint James³ wisely advises us to reverse this process. Put a mental stopwatch on our conversations and keep track of how much you talk and how much you listen. When people talk with you, are you listening to their viewpoints and ideas? Do they feel that their viewpoints and ideas have value? Or are you denying them the opportunity to express what is in their hearts? We need to think of the interest and welfare of others and put the clamp on the muscle in our mouth. Remember we do not learn anything when we are constantly talking.

Use your gifts and talents

Some of us may have 'the gift of the gab', exceptional knowledge, wisdom or insight. Such gifts or talents when used with grace, humility and love, serve to edify and encourage others. Even if we are not so 'gifted', if we are compelled to have the last say, we could choose words that soothe and heal, not sting and hurt.

We need, therefore, to be cautious with having the last say. Because in our many words, God who is our Judge and who is now listening, ultimately has the final say. □

¹ James 4:17

² Luke 6:27, 35-36

³ James 1:19

Most of us are compulsive talkers and selective listeners. We need to be compulsive listeners and selective talkers.

Anonymous

Wise people speak because they have something to say.

Fools, because they have to say something!

Anonymous

Talking is easier than doing, and promising than performing.

Old German proverb

There are things I can't force.

I must adjust. There are times when the greatest change needed is a change of my viewpoint.

Denis Diderot

The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook.

William James

I am the light who has come into the world, so that all who believe in Me may not continue living in the darkness.

Jesus

For the natural man does not

receive the things of the Spirit of God;

for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually perceived.

St. Paul

Teach me, and I will forget.

Ask me, and I will remember.

Involve me, and I will understand.

Chinese proverb

The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable.

The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude...

I am convinced that life is 10 per cent what happens to me and 90 per cent how I react to it.

And so it is with you...

We are in charge of our attitudes.

Charles Swindoll

A pessimist is one who makes difficulties of his opportunities and an optimist is one who makes opportunities of his difficulties.

Harry S. Truman

Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future.

Paul Boese

You cannot go around and keep score. If you keep score on the good things and the bad things, you'll find out that you're a very miserable person. God gave man the ability to forget, which is one of the greatest attributes you have.

Because if you remember everything that's happened to you, you generally remember that which are the most unfortunate.

Hubert H. Humphrey

A slip of the foot you may soon recover, but a slip of the tongue you may never get over.

Benjamin Franklin

Tact is the knack of making a point without making an enemy.

Isaac Newton

You should examine yourself daily.

If you find faults, you should correct them. When you find none, you should try even harder.

Anonymous

He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened.

A leader is best when people barely know he exists. When his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say, "We did it ourselves."

Lao-tzu

When anger rises, think of the consequences.

Confucius

If you do not wish to be prone to anger, do not feed the habit; give it nothing which may tend to its increase.

**Epictetus
Greek thinker**

The choice to be angry and stay angry is one that only you can make.

If you want to resolve any matters or conflict with others, you first need to be in control of your own feelings.

Daniel Theyagu

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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Faith in victor

It is easy to have faith when everything is going well. But faith is needed most when we face danger. The “faith chapter”, Hebrews 11, continues with stories of how people remained faithful in life-threatening situations.

Moses

The author takes several episodes from the life of Moses. He starts with his parents, Amram and Jochebed: “By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.”¹

Moses’ parents saw that God had a special purpose

by
**Michael
Morrison**

also facing disgrace for the sake of Christ. Even if they might lose a lot of money, the choice should be clear, because God offers a far more valuable reward. It’s in the future, but it’s worth waiting for, even if we have to suffer for our allegiance to Christ.

“By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible.”⁵ The first time Moses left Egypt, he was afraid,⁶ but the author here is probably referring to the Exodus, when Moses had courage. (There are several parts of Hebrews 11 that are not in chronological order. The author is giving a motivational speech, not a history lesson, and he is selective about which events he reports, and in what order.) The point for the readers:



for this boy, and they risked their lives to keep him.² The lesson implied for the readers (who seem to be facing a threat of persecution) is that they should not be afraid of a government edict, either.

“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.”³ Moses turned down a privileged position, and chose instead to be part of the people of God. He gave up the easy life and suffered. If the readers have faith like Moses, they will be faithful, even if they are persecuted.

“He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”⁴ The readers were

Do not be afraid of the king—keep God in the picture. Moses saw God at the burning bush, but for us He is invisible.

The author presents two more examples from the Exodus: “By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.”⁷ The Exodus is credited to the faith of all the people. The Egyptians had faith, too—they believed they could cross the seabed just like the Israelites did. But their faith was in vain, because it was not based on the promise of God. All the great moments of Israelite history came about through faith, so we should not be

y and in death

surprised if God calls on us to have faith in perilous circumstances, too.

Life in Canaan

The author now moves to the Israelite conquest of Canaan, and in doing this, he has skipped an important moment in Israelite history: Mt. Sinai. Hebrews says nothing about the role that Moses had in building the nation, because those situations were less relevant to the readers. The author is trying to get the readers to stop looking to Moses and his covenant; he is not going to praise it here. He emphasises Moses' role as a fugitive, as a person who went out.

Then the people reach Canaan: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days. By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."⁸ Surprise! The heroes in Israelite history include a non-Israelite woman. She was saved by faith, in contrast with people who disobeyed (disobeyed God, that is, rather than the king of Jericho).

The author could go on, but he has already amassed enough evidence to illustrate his point, so now he wraps it up: "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets."⁹

The author does not dwell on the history of the people as a nation—he was more interested in illustrating people who were isolated and persecuted. But he mentions some blessings that came with faith. Through faith, these people "conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised."¹⁰ They gained Canaan, but they did not gain all that God had promised.¹¹

The author skips to the end of the Scriptures for some final examples. Through faith, he says, some people shut the mouths of lions,¹² quenched the fury of the flames,¹³ and escaped the edge of the sword [possibly the story in Esther]; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.¹⁴

A great contrast

Then the author moves from triumph to tragedy: "Women received back their dead, raised to life again. [But] there were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection."¹⁵ In times of triumph, Elijah and Elisha brought people back to life.¹⁶ But other equally great prophets were persecuted to death for that "better resurrection". The author's comments remind one of a story from the Jewish history book 1 Maccabees, chapter 7. Here we are told about seven brothers who were tortured by the Syrian ruler, while their mother reminded them that God would resurrect the faithful—a resurrection even better than Elijah and Elisha

restoring people back to life.

History is full of people who refused to give up, even when threatened with death, and God wants His people to have faith like that—a faith that sees beyond the temporary treasures and temporary trials of this world, and seeks the heavenly country, the city built by God, the place of permanent reward.

Hebrews tells us what it may cost: "Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them."¹⁷ If you are persecuted, the author says, you are in good company. The world does not deserve to have such honourable people in its midst, but God puts His people here anyway.

"They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised."¹⁸ These trials were not punishments from God, nor evidence that God had taken away His protection. These people were strong in faith, and yet had troubles in this life. That's because the promise of God is not a better life in this world—it is life in a better world.

We will all die, but for those who die in the faith, the promises are guaranteed. The readers are worried about threats of persecution, so the author encourages them to keep their eyes on the eternal, not the temporary.

"God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."¹⁹ God wants us to join the heroes, and we will be rewarded together; we will all be brought to the finish line if we keep the faith. ■

¹ Hebrews 11:23

² Exodus 2:1–10

³ Hebrews 11:24–25

⁴ Hebrews 11:26

⁵ Hebrews 11:27

⁶ Exodus 2:14

⁷ Hebrews 11:28–29

⁸ Hebrews 11:30–31

⁹ Hebrews 11:32

¹⁰ Hebrews 11:33

¹¹ Hebrews 11:39

¹² Daniel 6

¹³ Daniel 3

¹⁴ Hebrews 11:34

¹⁵ Hebrews 11:35

¹⁶ 1 Kings 17:17–23; 2 Kings 4:17–35

¹⁷ Hebrews 11:36–38

¹⁸ Hebrews 11:38–39

¹⁹ Hebrews 11:40

Questions for discussion

- In what circumstances would I choose pain over pleasures? (Hebrews 11:25)
- Why was Rahab the only person in Jericho who put her life in God's hands? (Hebrews 11:31)
- Who turned weakness into strength? (Hebrews 11:34) Can I do that, too?
- In what way were the Old Testament heroes waiting for us? (Hebrews 11:40)
- What New Testament heroes of faith are there? Who had victories, and who had tragedies?

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