

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

"I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."—2 Corinthians 6:18

Volume 10 Number 5

June 2008

Throwing Stones

By Robert Berendt

Page 3



I carry a little stone with me—as a reminder...

Just Add Water

By Andy McClain

Page 6



God shapes us in much the same way an artist molds ceramic clay—using the “water” of the Holy Spirit.

Smoke Signal

By Dan Dowd

Page 9



When all the options we can see go up in flames—what then?

Our Children at Risk

By Kathy Cochrane

Page 12



My heart aches for the precious children I met at the amusement park.

Please Take the Lead

By Pam Redline

Page 15



I was certain my husband didn't know how to dance at all. But there he was demonstrating new steps with the instructor!

Childhood's End

By Mike Bennett

Page 18



When I read Arthur C. Clarke's science-fiction classic Childhood's End as a teenager, it startled me with its visions of the transformation of humanity. Clarke's death this March led me to ponder again its parallels and twists on man's truly startling biblical destiny.

Letters to the Editor

Page 21

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Throwing Stones

By Robert Berendt

I carry a little stone with me—as a reminder...



MY BROTHER AND I LOVED TO PRETEND we were big league baseball pitchers when we were boys. We would make a pitcher's mound and a home plate and spend hours throwing balls into the "strike zone." In time we both developed pretty good throwing arms. We could throw a ball or rock farther than most boys our age.

I recall one time when we were throwing snowballs from the hill on the way to school down toward a man loading wood onto a sled that was being pulled by two horses. When I threw with all my might, I almost hit a horse and the team bolted. A woman was walking by and was frightened.



The incident was reported to the officials, and that afternoon a man came to our school to warn us of the danger that we had put people in. He did not try to find the culprits (or culprit) who did the deed, but the warning and our own consciences were enough. We never again threw snowballs from the hill.

Carrying a reminder

Not long ago I visited a dear friend, and during our conversation he showed me a smooth stone that he carried with him all the time. It was not a large stone and looked rather attractive since it

had been polished. He explained that he carried the stone to remind himself not to throw stones at others.

I thought it was a great idea and I have been carrying my own little stone ever since.

Casting the first stone?

I often think of the powerful story in the Bible of the woman caught in adultery. She was brought before Jesus Christ by men who were mentally ready to throw stones at her (John 8:1-11). They wanted to stone her to death for her sin (Deuteronomy 22:22).

Jesus knew she was guilty. However, He had not come to judge but to save lives. It must have been an enormous relief to the woman when her accusers left and when Jesus said He did not condemn her. One can only wonder what her thoughts were at this time.

The men ready to stone her had sins that also needed to be forgiven. When Jesus said that he who was without sin could cast the first stone, each man left. As Christ wrote in the dust, apparently each man came to recognize that he also had sinned.



It is easy to throw stones, but it is godly to remember that we, too, need to be forgiven.

I want to keep my stone in my pocket because I, too, recognize the fact that I have sinned and that Jesus died for my sins when He could have just as easily condemned me. I do not want to be like the men who were ready to condemn and stone the woman. I want to be like Jesus Christ who recognized sin, but also introduced a new way of thinking. Forgiveness from God requires a repentant heart that God recognizes. The true goal of every Christian ought to be that he or she becomes like Jesus Christ in his or her thinking (Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2).

It is easy to throw stones, but it is godly to remember that we, too, need to be forgiven. That kind of attitude shows that we value the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Not jumping to judgment

People who have learned to be slow to judge, criticize or give advice are people who are loved by many. They have friends and the respect of those they interact with. All of us seem to be ready to give advice or tell people how things should be done long before we are asked.

Words can destroy lives just as surely as the biggest rock.

That “bent” toward being judgmental is part of the motivation humans have for throwing stones at each other. Often we deflect criticism of ourselves by looking at others. It seems to make us feel better when we can find flaws in another person. Perhaps our own flaws seem smaller then. Jesus spoke to that in Matthew 7:3-4 when He stated that we are to be sure our own eyes are clear before we reach out to remove a speck from the eyes of our brothers or sisters.

Words that break bones

The stones we throw most often come from our mouths. One often hears of young people who have been bullied and pushed aside to the point that they despair of life. Words can destroy lives just as surely as the biggest rock.



Proverbs 25:18 speaks to the damage words can do. Words are likened to a club, sword or sharp arrow. Proverbs 16:27-28 reveals that words have the power to separate the closest friends and that ungodly men dig up evil about others.

Most often those motivated to spread rumors and gossip are people who have very low opinions of themselves and are trying to feel or look better by making others feel or look worse. This is one of the worst forms of selfishness and self-centeredness. We make ourselves feel better by throwing stones at others.

Casting blame

In Genesis we can read about Adam and Eve. Although they both sinned, they simply could not admit that they were to blame. Eve blamed the serpent, Adam blamed Eve and, in a way, both blamed God. Nowhere in the account is seen the self-examination and repentance that God seeks from humans.

To the credit of the members of the gang who were eager to stone the adulteress brought before Christ—they did look at themselves and slunk away when they recognized their own sins. The lesson leads to a much better life. When we are spiritually strong enough not to require the façade of self-righteousness to hide behind as we accuse others, then life becomes much happier and healthier. We can be more like Christ and less like the stone throwers.

Practicing

My brother and I became very good at throwing baseballs because we practiced a lot. So, too, a critic can throw bigger and more damaging stones through practice. We can improve in any facet of life through practice. We can even get good at looking into what is taught in the Bible, God's mirror, and asking if we should throw stones. We may even be able to curb our often-wayward tongues and learn to cause healing to take place in our interactions with others.

We may even be able to curb our often-wayward tongues and learn to cause healing to take place in our interactions with others.

Proverbs 16:21-24 is encouraging. We can add "health to the bones" of others just as Jesus did to the adulteress. It seems His admonition to "go and sin no more" was not lost to this woman because He did not throw a stone with His mouth or with His hand.

I carry a little stone to remind me to be more like Him. It also reminds me to practice looking in God's mirror. But whether you carry a stone in your pocket or not, remember not to throw one!

Recommended reading

To read more about how to stop throwing stones at others in your life and to start thinking in a more spiritual frame of mind, please request our free booklet [*Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*](#).

Just Add Water

By Andy McClain

God shapes us in much the same way an artist molds ceramic clay—using the “water” of the Holy Spirit.



WHEN YOU WERE IN SCHOOL, did you ever work with ceramic clay in art class? Maybe the teacher gave you a lump of clay, and let you make anything you dared to out of it. If you were like me, maybe you rolled your clay into a long snake. You might have used a wooden spoon or other tools to mold your clay. Perhaps you tried to make a cup with a handle. Or if your class had a pottery wheel, maybe you tried to make a vase.

We are the clay

We are very much like the ceramic clay children use in art class. In fact, God compares us to clay with Himself as the master potter. “But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand” (Isaiah 64:8).

One thing you might remember from using clay in art class is that the more you worked the clay, the drier it became, and the more difficult it was to shape. Something needed to be added for you to continue to mold the clay. So, you used another item the teacher placed in front of you—a small cup of water. By dropping small amounts of water on the clay and rubbing it in, you were able to make the clay supple and pliable again.



Spiritual water

Like the clay, we also need “water” for God to mold us. Without the water, symbolizing the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39), we cannot be molded into the shape God desires us to become.

Exactly how does God mold us? God molds us in the same way that we mold clay—He uses water. Isaiah 44:3 reads, “For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring.”



As spiritual descendants of Abraham, the gift of God’s Spirit is given to each of us upon repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit is God’s power that enables us to live His way (Micah 3:8; Jeremiah 32:17). It gives us spiritual strength and understanding (John 14:26). God’s Spirit works in our mind as the tool that helps to mold our thoughts and attitudes to become like Him.

One of the most important things a potter can do when working with clay is to get used to the texture and feel of the clay. There is a very practical reason for this. Because there are many different types and qualities of clay, and each type of clay is suitable for a particular task, it is only through actually working with the clay that the potter can know the clay’s quality and ability.

God does the same with us. He knows our strengths and growth areas as we allow Him to work in our lives. Similarly, our place within the Body of Christ is by His design and purpose (Romans 12:4-8).

Remember that clay must remain wet throughout the working process. We must be constantly drawing upon God’s Spirit in our lives for us to be pliable in God’s molding process.

Let’s now take a look at four ways God uses the Holy Spirit to mold us.

C—changes and cleanses

The Holy Spirit changes our thinking and helps to cleanse us. The apostle Paul tells us to “put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Without the water, symbolizing the Holy Spirit, we cannot be molded into the shape God desires us to become.

Quite simply, as *Barnes’ Notes* states, “Every thing that proceeded from sin; every habit, and custom, and mode of speech and of conduct that was the result of depravity, is to be laid aside. The special characteristics of an unconverted man you are to put off, and are to assume those which are the proper fruits of a renewed heart.”

This is a tall order. That is why God gives us His Holy Spirit in our minds to help us. As the “Master Potter,” God knows what we can become. We are to “depart from iniquity” and labor until “Christ is formed” in us (Galatians 4:19; 2 Timothy 2:15, 19).

L—lives

The Holy Spirit lets Christ live in us. Paul tells us, “You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you” (Romans 8:9-10). God places a portion of His Holy Spirit within our minds at baptism making us His begotten children. This means that in essence Christ lives in us. We then have a tremendous responsibility to grow spiritually by trying to live our lives as Jesus Christ Himself would (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27-29).

It is only through God's Spirit that we can understand spiritual things, because God's laws are spiritual laws.

Paul makes this very clear when he says, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:12-13). Eventually we can begin to behave like God because of His Spirit dwelling within us.

A—allows understanding

The Holy Spirit allows us to understand spiritual things. Paul said, “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10). This understanding is a wonderful gift from God (verse 12). “The Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (verse 13).

Unless we have the Spirit, our minds consider God's truth foolishness. It is only through God's Spirit that we can understand spiritual things, because God's laws are spiritual laws (Isaiah 11:1-2; John 6:63).

Y—yields fruits

The Holy Spirit helps us yield fruits of righteousness. Any righteousness we produce is because “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). God wants us to be like Him, and He will make us “complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight” (Hebrews 13:21).

Paul outlines the fruits of the Spirit for us in Galatians 5:22-23. But for us to produce these fruits, we must draw upon and use the Holy Spirit every day. Only with the help of God's Spirit within us can we bear fruit (John 15:1-8).

The wonderful advantage of clay is that you can wipe out any mistakes and start again. However, in order to do so, the clay must always be kept moist. It is the same way with our minds. For God to mold us, we must be connected with Him by stirring up the Holy Spirit within us. In this way God can continually work with us and forgive us when we make mistakes and repent.

We are very much like the ceramic clay children use in art class. In fact, God compares us to clay with Himself as the master potter.

Apart from God's Holy Spirit, we are simply what the acronym spells—CLAY. But with the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, combined with our willingness to yield, God can mold us into His children, having perfect, righteous character.

“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Timothy 2:20-21).

God takes dust of the ground, adds water and creates vessels of honor to be servants in His coming Kingdom.

Recommended reading

Read more about why we need the Holy Spirit and about the miracle of transformation it works in us in the booklet [The Road to Eternal Life](#). Download or request a free copy today.

Smoke Signal

By Dan Dowd

When all the options we can see go up in flames—what then?



THE STORY IS TOLD OF THE ONLY SURVIVOR of a shipwreck who was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed fervently for God to rescue him. Every day he scanned the horizon for help, but no one came.

He eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect himself from the elements, and to store his few possessions. One day, after searching for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames. What could be worse! Everything was lost. He was stunned with disbelief, grief and anger. He cried out, “God! How could you do this to me?”

Early the next day, he was awakened by the sound of a ship approaching the island! It had come to rescue him! “How did you know I was here?” he asked his rescuers.

“We saw your smoke signal,” they replied.

The moral of this story: It’s easy to get discouraged when things are going bad, but we shouldn’t lose heart, because God is at work in our lives even in the midst of our pain and suffering. Remember that the next time your little hut seems to be burning to the ground; it just may be a smoke signal that summons the grace of God.

It’s easy to get discouraged when things are going bad, but we shouldn’t lose heart, because God is at work in our lives even in the midst of our pain and suffering.

God knows

There have been times I have felt like my hut was on fire—times when I thought my options were in the ashes. How about you? We can get so invested in what we think are the only options for God to deliver us, that we can forget that He is sovereign and can direct our paths in ways that are beyond our thinking (Isaiah 55:8-9).

This should not be news to us, for we have many examples in the Bible to show us that God is aware of His people and will take care of them (Psalm 34:15, 17). Job thought everything important in his life was gone in one day. Joseph saw his whole life change on the day his brothers sold him into slavery.

Moses figured his life was over when he killed the Egyptian and fled for his life. Sampson saw (or didn’t see, as the case may be) his life completely unravel when Delilah cut off his hair and the Philistines put out his eyes. Martha and Mary were consumed with grief when they buried Lazarus knowing Christ could have healed him.

God could have worked with those individuals differently, but He didn’t. He saw a way to reach them on a particular level so they could be more than they thought possible. Do you realize that God sees us the same way?



In Deuteronomy 14:2 we are told that God has chosen us, and made us a holy people. In 1 Peter 2:9 we are reminded that “you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

Edison’s disaster

Thomas Edison is known as a prodigious inventor, designing the phonograph, the incandescent light bulb and hundreds of other useful things. But he had many failures and losses as well.



On Dec. 9, 1914, a fire broke out and quickly engulfed most of the factories surrounding his laboratories. Firefighters came from all around, but were only able to save a small part of the complex. The supposedly fireproof concrete buildings were insured for only a fraction of their value.

Would Edison’s spirit be broken by this disaster?

Charles Swindoll records this tragic episode in Edison’s life in his book *Hand Me Another Brick* (1978, pp. 82-83). He tells how the inventor’s 24-year-old son, Charles, searched frantically for his father. He finally found him, calmly

watching the fire.

“My heart ached for him,” said Charles. “He was 67—no longer a young man—and everything was going up in flames. When he saw me, he shouted, ‘Charles, where’s your mother?’ When I told him I didn’t know, he said, ‘Find her. Bring her here. She will never see anything like this as long as she lives.’”

The next morning, Edison looked at the ruins and said, “There is great value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Thank God we can start anew.” Just weeks after the fire, Edison was back in business.

God is not interested in maintaining our “huts” if allowing them to be destroyed brings us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Great possibilities

God is not interested in maintaining our “huts” if allowing them to be destroyed brings us out of darkness into His marvelous light. May God show you great possibilities through the tough times you may face.

Recommended reading

Often we face difficult trials and problems we can’t understand. The free booklet [Why Does God Allow Suffering?](#) can help. Download or request a free copy today.

Our Children at Risk

By Kathy Cochrane

My heart aches for the precious children I met at the amusement park.



LAST SUMMER, I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to work at an amusement park catering to children through second grade. I was able to observe how families interacted with one another.

Some had parents who were definitely in tune to their children; they were kind, loving, positive and obviously enjoyed being together as a family (Proverbs 22:6). Others were extremely negative, impatient, unkind and critical, oftentimes on cell phones conducting business or conversing with friends (Ephesians 6:4; Proverbs 29:15).

All these little ones were touched by the treatment of their parents, in both positive and negative ways.

Christ gave us an example of His love and care for little ones. His deep concern for them is obvious in His interaction with them and healing (Mark 9:17, 25; Luke 9:38-42; John 4:49-51). Jesus, although a single man, valued children.

Time is a commodity so hard to come by, yet Jesus chose to spend time with them. What a wonderful example! He rebuked His disciples when they attempted to shoo them away (Matthew 19:14). He welcomed children (Luke 9:48) and told us to become childlike too (Matthew 18:2-5).

Challenges of raising children in “enemy territory”

Any parent will attest that child rearing is the most difficult job they have ever undertaken.

Herbert Armstrong, who was pastor general of the Church of God for many years, often quoted Ephesians 2:2 to remind members that Satan is the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air.



What does this mean to you and your children? Satan is innovative and tireless in broadcasting to our children and us. Satan is subtly robbing us of our children’s minds and sometimes their very lives. He cunningly instills negative thoughts, feelings and attitudes through TV, music, the Internet, video games and movies. It is a constant assault day-in and day-out, impacting every aspect of life.

Satan never gets tired, as we do after a hard day at work. He is only too happy to fill the void our fatigue creates in the lives of our children with negativity, self-doubt, resentment and bitterness (Galatians 5:19-21). Satan tries to sway us all with the fleshly desires leading to death.

A friend’s 19-year-old son recently committed suicide. His obituary seemed a contradiction: He was handsome, voted captain of the football team, had traveled extensively. He was a wonderful student academically as well as socially. Not long after this, we heard of a girl who also felt at 19 she had no other option but to take her own life. Then I heard of a relative, also 19, who had thoughts of doing the same. She is a brilliant college student, pretty and a well-loved young woman. *What is happening?*

Satan is innovative and tireless in broadcasting to our children and us. Satan is subtly robbing us of our children’s minds and sometimes their very lives.

So many of our children and teens, and so many adults, too, feel hopeless and alone and that no one cares. Satan wants us to think we’re not tall enough, not thin enough or too thin. We are listening to his lies saying we are not pretty or handsome enough; we don’t have enough money or aren’t smart enough. He wants us to think, “I am just not enough!”

These negative messages are reinforced in commercials and music videos that promise happiness through sex, fashion and immoral lifestyles, but only bring pain.

Each of us is made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26) and He loves each and every one just as we physically are! God in His infinite wisdom chose you to hear His message and be offered a chance to be His son or daughter (Ephesians 1:5). He sees in you something He wants to use, and He wants you with Him for eternity (John 3:16; Romans 8:15). As His children, we are a special gift, a treasure and precious in His sight.

What can we do?

Are we diligently guarding our minds? Are we very selective about what we watch, read and who we associate with? Are we providing these same safe boundaries for our children (without stifling them as they grow toward independence)? Do we know where they are, whom they call friends and how they spend their time?

Many homes have TVs in every room. I am appalled at the offerings on prime-time television. They are not fit for any of us, let alone our children. Even the *TV Guide* Channel is riddled with foul language and obscenity. Please take the opportunity to learn how to block inappropriate channels. Call your cable or dish company for step-by-step directions.

Are we diligently guarding our minds? Are we very selective about what we watch, read and who we associate with?

Can our children talk to us? Are we creating a loving, safe zone at home where anything can be discussed with respect for each person's thoughts and feelings? Beginning this practice with your children at a young age will insure that they will continue to come to you when they are teens. Are we communicating how God helps us in time of need? Do we give our children practical examples they can relate to?

Do we articulate how we are dependent on God for help with our problems? Do they see you praying? Do you pray as a family? Does your family have a miracle book everyone can write in? Do your children know how to recognize miracles in their lives? Do you discuss the miracles you are blessed with? Is fun, age-appropriate Bible study part of your family life?

We need to arm our children with skills to resist Satan's onslaught. It can be helpful to them if we find teachable moments to talk about a certain situation that may arise and ask how they would handle it (Proverbs 11:14). Equip them with words that will assist them in the event they find themselves in dangerous situations or times when their peers or friends try to get them to go along with something inappropriate. Discuss what they might say.



When our children were growing up, I let them know they could call me from any place, at any time they felt unsafe or realized they needed to get away from a situation without questions. Our son actually did call us once. He later related there were drugs at the party and knowing we wouldn't pry made calling possible. He was embarrassed to have made a poor judgment call when accepting the invitation.

I believe Dr. James Dobson's book *Preparing for Adolescence* would be a helpful icebreaker covering many topics. It addresses pertinent issues such as not fitting in, drugs, alcohol, premarital sex, etc., in a straightforward way. While intended for preteens, I feel it should be read by parents and discussed together. It is wiser to discuss these issues before worldly influences try to persuade our young people to do things the wrong way.

As we live and share this way of life with our children, our example will be more powerful than our words. Ask God for His guidance. He has given us the book of Proverbs filled with practical advice. Look for interesting ways to share these gems with your children.

God's way is the only way to ensure happiness in this lifetime. His messages to us in the Bible bring peace and comfort. When we are immersed in doing things His way, we have comfort when we are in the midst of a trial. We know all things will work for good.

We can't possibly do this alone; however, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Cherish the children

At the amusement park, one little girl told me she lived in Portsmouth and Amesbury because her parents were divorced. I took that opportunity to assure her that the wonderful thing about the hearts of parents is that they always love their children. Sadly, upon further reflection, for some, I realize this is not true. My heart aches for these precious children.

Let us all renew our efforts to love and cherish our children.

Recommended reading

The booklet [*Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*](#) is full of helpful information for building happy, stable families in this not-so-family-friendly world. Download or request a free copy today.

Please Take the Lead

By Pam Redline

I was certain my husband didn't know how to dance at all. But there he was demonstrating new steps with the instructor!



MY HUSBAND AND I JUST CELEBRATED our 22nd wedding anniversary. The volumes I could write about our experiences are many. I am certain the same is true for any married couple.

I have always had an independent spirit. This meant that the biggest problem I had coming into my marriage is that I was certain I had all the answers and, in my pride, I would not even think of letting my husband lead some areas of my life. Yes, it was fine for him to guide the areas I doled out to him, but to surrender totally? No way.

I am thankful I am still able to learn some new tricks.

Dance class

One such experience we learned from was when we enrolled in a ballroom dance class three years ago. All the time we had been married, I was certain my husband did not know how to dance at all, let alone ballroom dance.

Quickly my husband became the teacher's pet. Every time she wanted a partner to show the intricacies of a step, she would ask my husband if he would oblige. Together they would waltz, foxtrot or swing around the floor in perfect harmony. I had to ask myself how that could have happened. It must have been some dormant DNA or something.



The hilarious part of this story is that I finally realized that, in all the years of our marriage, I had never fully let him take the lead when we were dancing. In fact, I never fully let him take the lead in anything. Wow! I have learned some interesting things about him and me. He is an excellent dancer and always has been. Once I let him truly lead, we moved much more smoothly through our dances, and now we have a lot of fun with a lot less struggle. Our marriage has benefited from that lesson as well.

The one piece of advice I would give anyone, whether married or seeking to be married, is to work as a team by allowing one of the team members to really take the lead. (The Bible assigns this role to the husband, as described in Ephesians 5:22-33.) This has been a struggle for millennia, as divorce and broken homes are a witness to the pride and arrogance of our species. However, when two people really love one another and want to make a relationship work, the key is really quite amazing.

The best way I can think of wording it is not my own speech but that of a man named Pierre Dulaine.

Pierre Dulaine's story

Recently my family and I watched a movie called *Take the Lead*. It is based on the true story of Pierre Dulaine, a ballroom dance instructor in New York City. Inspired by an incident in his life, the idea was born to take ballroom dance lessons into a local high school. The principal of the high school was so desperate for a teacher to watch the students in detention, she let him take the class. She definitely had doubts about his ability to succeed.

Once I let him truly lead, we moved much more smoothly through our dances, and now we have a lot of fun with a lot less struggle.

He enthusiastically began by trying to instruct the students in the fine art of ballroom dance. At first there was much resistance and ridicule but, over time, he won the students' trust and a class was truly born. As the story unfolded, Pierre even gained support from the school's PTA. The principal then went so far as to hire him to continue with his classes.

At a point later in the story, he paired up a young black man with a young black girl. These two had family rivalry between them and were very upset and refused to work together at first.

However, because he had gained the principal's support and the students' knew they needed to attend his class in order to graduate from high school, they acquiesced and agreed to work together.

The one piece of advice I would give anyone, whether married or seeking to be married, is to work as a team by allowing one of the team members to really take the lead.

When they began to dance the first time, the girl pushed at the young man, trying to make him dance the proper way. Pierre then told the girl to follow the boy's lead. The girl became very upset because she believed it gave the boy the permission to "push her around." Pierre's comeback was, "*The man proposes the step. It is up to the woman to choose to accept the step and then to follow.*"

When the young man tried to lead, she continued to resist. Pierre told the young man, "*Don't dominate her; take her on a journey.*"

The girl, still fuming, continued to resist until Pierre said, "*It takes as much strength to follow as it does to lead.*"

I know if someone had revealed these fine points to me when I was first married, my husband would have had an easier time over these 22 years. I am thankful I am still able to learn some new tricks.

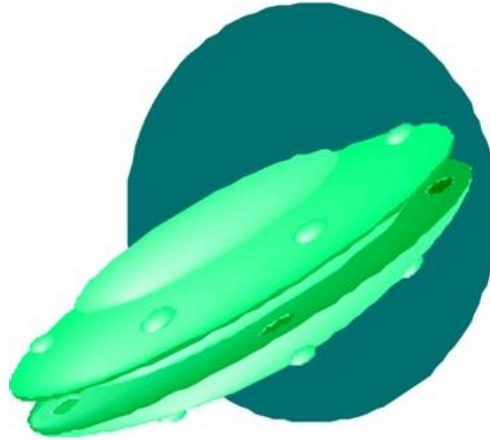
Inside the card I gave him for our anniversary this year I wrote, "Thank you for proposing the step. I accept and will follow."

For more tips on how to have a happy marriage, download or request the free booklet [Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension](#).

Childhood's End

By Mike Bennett

When I read Arthur C. Clarke's science-fiction classic Childhood's End as a teenager, it startled me with its visions of the transformation of humanity. Clarke's death this March led me to ponder again its parallels and twists on man's truly startling biblical destiny.



SCIENCE FICTION, IN THE HANDS OF A MASTER like Arthur C. Clarke, can explore transcendent themes rarely addressed outside the realm of philosophy and religion.

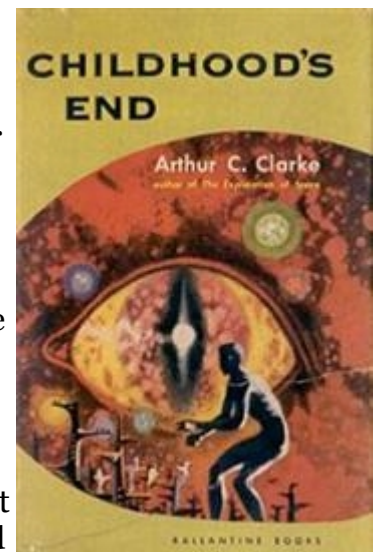
As a teen in the 1970s, I found *Childhood's End*, Clarke's 1953 novel, gripping and unsettling. Timeless themes erupt from the tensions of its time—in the shadow of the mushroom cloud, four years before *Sputnik* launched the space race.

Written in the midst of what Clarke later called “the most barbaric century in history,” the book moves rapidly from mankind's baby steps into space to a massive and mysterious alien invasion. Spaceships hover over all the major cities (a scene much copied in science fiction since, à la *Independence Day*).

Soon humanity realizes that resistance is futile—that our puny power is nothing when measured on a cosmic scale. Yes, the reclusive aliens have saved man from nuclear suicide—but for what purpose? The trade-off for utopia on earth seems to be giving up visions of visiting the heavens. “The stars are not for Man,” the unseen alien Karellell tells them.

Clarke, with his trademark twists and imagination-stretching ideas, kept me entranced. The book explores pride and powerlessness, freedom and frustration, curiosity and conformity—and much more.

Many critics, fans and Clarke himself judged *Childhood's End* to be the finest novel of his nearly 100 books.



What stands out in my memory, after more than three decades, is Clarke’s vision that the end of humanity marks the beginning of a higher level of existence for their offspring.

The mysterious aliens—who turn out to have pointed tails and to envy the humans—are apparently a catalyst in humanity’s complete transformation.

While the older generations die out, the children are destined to join the Overmind.

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Human destiny

Why did this book disturb me so much? It gave me a feeling of déjà vu, with a twist. Arthur C. Clarke’s alternate universe eerily reminded me of another cosmic story I had been reading, but transmogrified, like an image in a fun-show mirror.

The other story also included demonic beings jealous of the human potential to move to a higher level of existence. These beings also didn’t want to be seen—but more, they did not even want humans to believe they existed. And their purpose was to thwart humans from reaching the next level—not to facilitate it as in Clarke’s literary universe.

The other work I had been reading was not science fiction—far from it. It was actually the translation of ancient texts written by wise men who claimed to have seen the future and to have contact with beings from outside this realm.



They claimed to have been contacted by the Overmind of Overminds. Even though they found it hard to believe themselves, their collective story reveals a hidden human potential beyond their wildest dreams.

They claim humans are destined to become children of the Creator of the universe—to join God’s family!

One of these ancient texts says, “Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” The same writer almost 2,000 years ago wrote of a transformation from mortal flesh and blood to immortality “in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye.”

These writers talked about the universe—everything—coming under man’s control as humans see—and become like—the transcendent and truly benevolent Lord of Lords.

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What’s the point?

Arthur C. Clarke was an amazing man. He imagined communications satellites in geosynchronous orbit way back in 1945. He explored the ocean depths. He hosted television shows. But in a video reflecting on his 90th birthday in December 2007, he said he would most like to be remembered as a writer who has “entertained readers and hopefully stretched their imaginations as well.”

The other epic I was reading (and am still reading today) claims not to be fiction at all, but mind-expanding reality. Most who read it today do not grasp its depth or the power of its vision. The themes mentioned above are, of course, from the Holy Bible—the most printed but perhaps least understood book of all time. (The quotes and references are from 1 Corinthians 15:49, 52; Hebrews 2:8; and 1 John 3:2 in the New International Version.)

These themes are rarely explored in most churches and are even considered suspect by many.



That Clarke touched on these transcendent themes and deep philosophical questions in a way that got me to thinking is to his credit. Clearly he did not believe in the story of the Bible or any other religion for that matter. He left clear instructions that his funeral not include religious rites of any kind.

But he was obviously concerned about the future destiny of mankind. In his 90th birthday video he said he hoped “we have learned something from the most barbaric century in history—the 20th. I would like to see us overcome our tribal divisions and begin to think and act as if we are one family.”

One of his three wishes brought this hope even more down to earth. He said, “I dearly wish to see lasting peace established in Sri Lanka [his adopted home for over 50 years] as soon as possible. But I’m aware that peace can not just be wished; it requires a great deal of hard work, courage and persistence.”

Sir Arthur C. Clarke’s death March 19, 2008, caused me to reflect on all this. I don’t believe a fleet of alien spaceships will come and stop man from destroying himself. I don’t believe the lessons of history show that man will somehow learn the way of peace on his own either.

But I do believe the real hope and destiny recorded in the ancient revelations from the Creator of the universe. There is a way of peace, and God holds out the plan and the power to accomplish it.

Someday—hopefully soon!—Sri Lanka and the whole world will have peace. The threat of the mushroom cloud will be removed. Real utopia will come, not at the hand of mysterious demonic-looking aliens, but by the intervention of Jesus Christ when He returns to earth in full glory. Life will not become meaningless, as it did for many in Clarke’s vision, but will have meaning far beyond man’s greatest dreams. Everyone will really understand man’s incredible destiny.

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Someday, humanity will be transformed—given immortal, spiritual life—as God brings “many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). The Bible describes a new heaven and new earth—a time when the stars will truly be ours (Revelation 21 and 22). Our new life will be to assist the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in ruling over the universe. The next chapters in the cosmic story are much more incredible than fiction!

Recommended reading

What does the Bible say about humanity's purpose and the meaning of life? The booklet [What Is Your Destiny?](#) gives a biblical foundation for the fascinating subject. Download or request a free copy today.

Letters to the Editor

Why change a good thing?



I like VCM the way it is. Why change a good thing??

As for the choices offered in the poll survey, I'd like to offer the following personal view:

I believe that [World News and Prophecy](#) is already doing an excellent job for in-depth news articles or current news. As VCM is an e-magazine, I have no wish to see articles from the other publications which are printed.

In fact, I wish funds were available so that VCM could be issued as a printed magazine. I find it very valuable as a very easy to read and "digest" magazine with its relatively short articles.

Please continue with the good work you are doing!

"Unknown God"



Thanks for [this article](#). Yes, we are so confused about God's nature these days. Some people use God to manipulate others. What terrible thing to do! What hypocrisy.

I pray that God would reveal Himself to us very soon, that He establishes His Kingdom very, very soon.

— Zisa Velasquez

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity