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Ecstasy! A Hug Drug or the Kiss of Death?

By Cecil E. Maranville

Millions of teens and young adults around the world are getting high on ecstasy. They believe it to be the ideal drug, bringing out the best in them with virtually no side effects or danger. But evidence is mounting that there are both side effects and danger--and much worse than initially thought.



ECSTASY, also known as "e," "Adam" or "XTC" is the latest fad drug among youth. That's not to say that is new--it was developed nearly a century ago by the German pharmaceutical company Merck and was used by psychotherapists briefly in the 1970s. It was popular for a few years in the 1980s as a street drug and then faded from the scene until recently. Now its use among youth is endemic.

How widespread is it? British police estimate that 500,000 Brits take the drug each weekend. Of the half-million young tourists visiting the Spanish island of Ibiza every summer, one in eight takes ecstasy nearly every night. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) says the drug is available in at least 21 states, as well as in Canada, and that it's especially popular with college students and young professionals.

E is called a "club drug," because it sold and used in dance clubs. Club drugs are popular with high school seniors and college students at all-night underground parties with techno music, which are called "raves." Commenting on a recent ecstasy bust in Phoenix, Arizona, police estimated that up to 90 percent of youths who attend rave parties take e.

Its street name stems from the belief that it creates a sense of blissful elation or ecstasy. Users believe it to be a "hug drug," a drug that lowers the user's inhibitions and makes

him experience feelings equal to those brought on by the sweetest success or the achievement of a lifetime. Users think that it is nonaddictive. Unlike any other drug, it heightens feelings of empathy, understanding and acceptance of other people. Probably the principal focus of users in this pleasure-pumped culture is ecstasy's reputed ability to amplify the delights of sexual intimacy. The crowning attractiveness of e is that it doesn't do anything harmful to the user--at least that has been the hype surrounding it. And young people are accepting the pitch by the millions. They pay \$20 to \$40 per hit/pill, which gives them a 6-to-8-hour high.



"Eight percent of U.S. high school seniors say they have tried it at least once, up from 5.8 percent in 1997.... [U.S.] customs officers have already seized more ecstasy this fiscal year, more than 5.4 million hits, than in all of last year. In 1998 they seized just 750,000 hits" (*Time*, "The Lure of Ecstasy," by John Cloud, June 5, 2000). No one can say with certainty how many hits made it onto the streets.

A multibillion dollar "industry"

60 Minutes II reported on its August 8 program that Amsterdam is the primary source of e coming into the United States. Reporter Vicki Maybrey interviewed a Dutch criminal investigator, whose special unit has closed down 35 ecstasy production labs in just the last five years. However, given the incredible profit margins involved, 10 labs pop up for every one that is put out of business.

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An ecstasy-producing machine from one of the closed down illegal labs was shown on the program. It was capable of producing 300 pills *per minute* at a cost of 20 cents each. That's 1.2 million pills a week, assuming that the machine operates for 10 hours every day. For a manufacturing cost of \$240,000, criminals produce drugs with potential market value of \$24 to \$48 million per week. Calculating the annual output for 50 weeks (do criminals give their employees two-week holidays?), that translates into \$1.2 to \$2.4 billion annually, *per lab*.

Considering the Dutch investigator's sober acknowledgment that 350 labs have sprung up in the last five years in his jurisdictional area of South Holland alone, the potential for ill-gotten gain staggers the imagination. Small wonder that organized crime is heavily involved in the distribution and sale of e. Maybrey said law-enforcement officials believe Israeli and Russian organized crime rings are responsible for most e brought into the United States.

If that is true, offshore organized crime is working hand in hand with U.S. crime families. Salvatore Gravano was arrested in Phoenix, Arizona, early this year for his involvement in peddling as many as 30,000 ecstasy pills a week. Gravano is better known by his nickname as "Sammy the Bull," given to him when he was a hit man for the mob, before he turned informant on the John Gotti crime family. The case is still in

trial, but Gravano's ecstasy organization is said to include a white-supremacist gang known as the Devil Dogs (because, believe it or not, gang members "bark" when they assault their victims).

Unsavoury merchants, to say the least. Why are young adults by the millions willing to sample their wares? Undoubtedly there is an element of antiestablishment daring so often a part of youth. "If my parents don't like it, I do! If my parents don't want me to take it, I will!" Further, e use is now a fad. It's what "the in crowd" is currently "into." And, ecstasy has a glowing reputation among the party culture for its many positive attributes and its reputed low downside.

What gives ecstasy its glowing name and reputation?

What causes those "positive attributes"? The chemical name for ecstasy is methylenedioxymethamphetamine, known by the acronym MDMA. It's "a synthetic, psychoactive (mind-altering) drug with hallucinogenic and amphetamine-like properties," according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) (www.drugabuse.com, MDMA (ecstasy), p. 1).

E users argue that the drug is not hallucinogenic, but rather "an acute antidepressant." That's a misrepresentation of what ecstasy does, as we will show. The ecstatic feelings created by MDMA are the result of a neurotransmitter known as serotonin. Although science does not fully understand the role of this neurotransmitter, serotonin is thought to help create positive moods. MDMA has a double force effect that infuses the brain with large amounts of serotonin.

First, it orders neurons that store serotonin to empty themselves.

It takes about an hour for receptors to bind with the serotonin and begin to cause feelings of empathy, happiness, increased sociability, enhanced sensation of touch and responsiveness to light. (Due to the powerful impact of light on the senses of e users, raves commonly have light shows. Rave dancers will wave glowing colored wands as they party, because of the highly pleasurable sensation it gives them. Parents need to be alert to teens who own brightly colored light wands, an indication of e use.) The pleasurable feelings, called "rolling" in the drug culture can continue for several more hours. *Some of these short-term effects have been fatal.*

How is MDMA able to evoke sensory responses greater than what the body normally produces? The amount of serotonin chemically "ordered" to be released by MDMA is a greatly increased level over what these neurons would release under normal conditions.

But that's only the first line of coercion by e on the brain's normal functions.

A normally functioning brain is designed to take some of the released serotonin back into its storage neurons. So, not all released serotonin binds to receptors--usually. However, MDMA chemically blocks the re-uptake of serotonin, forcing more to bind to

receptors, thus further amplifying the positive sensations associated with this marvelous neurotransmitter.

Only in this way does MDMA mimic an antidepressant, which also blocks the re-uptake of serotonin. However, antidepressants work only with the serotonin *naturally* released by the brain--a much smaller amount than that "kicked out" by MDMA. It's therefore a distortion of fact and a serious misrepresentation to claim that ecstasy is "an acute antidepressant."

Okay, what's the downside?

What's wrong with ecstasy? If the only effects were the hazards that we've already described, it sounds like little more than a harmless "rush." If only that were true. The NIDA reports that short-term effects of "MDMA are similar to those found with the use of amphetamines and cocaine. They are:

- **"Psychological difficulties**, including confusion, depression, sleep problems, drug craving, severe anxiety and paranoia, during *and sometimes weeks* after taking MDMA (even psychotic episodes have been reported).
- **"Physical symptoms** such as muscle tension, involuntary teeth-clenching, nausea, blurred vision, rapid eye movements, faintness and chills or sweating.
- **"Increases in heart rate and blood pressure**, a special risk for people with circulatory or heart disease" (www.drugabuse.com, NIDA Infobox, p. 1, emphasis added).

Some of these short-term effects have been fatal. MDMA raises the body temperature and causes profuse sweating. Caught up in a drug-induced euphoria in the crowded and chaotic environment of a rave (with *up to 2,000* partygoers at a time), users who did not realize what was happening to them have died from heat exhaustion and dehydration. Others have died from drinking too much water in an attempt to counteract the drug's negative effects.

"Between three and 10 percent of the white population (statistics are unavailable for other groups) have a genetic defect which causes them to produce less of the main enzyme which metabolizes MDMA. This means that if they take a normal dose, they can overdose. In Europe, there have been *dozens of deaths* related to this problem" (NewsWatch.org, "News You Can Abuse?" by Maria Szalavitz, Dec. 8, 1999, emphasis added).

The absence of normal amounts of serotonin in the brain as one comes down from an e-induced high translates into a seriously depressed state of mind, called "terrible Tuesdays" by users. Ignorant of what they have done to their bodies, some users attempt to counteract their depression by taking another or even several more hits of e. The first additional dose may be able to squeeze a little more serotonin from their storage neurons, but the effect is minimal. Any further hits will do nothing to relieve depression.

Normal brain functions require up to two weeks for serotonin to be replaced.

Serious as they are, these short-term problems constitute the best of the downside problems of taking MDMA. The long-term problems are worse, much worse.

Brain damage

Several factors cause damage to the brain. To understand, we need take another look at what MDMA does to brain neurons. We looked at the fact that it forces the release and use of large amounts of the neurotransmitter serotonin. We also saw that it prevents the re-uptake of serotonin to its storage areas. MDMA also causes the release of another neurotransmitter, dopamine.

MDMA allows the dopamine to return to the neurons that previously stored serotonin. The result is catastrophic, because the dopamine is toxic to those neurons. Their ability to store serotonin again is greatly diminished, if not ruined. Without serotonin, a person would suffer from clinical depression. Duke University pharmacology Professor Wilkie Wilson warns of the possibility of permanent brain damage to ecstasy users. "The drug is spreading so fast among so many people that I'm really afraid that we're going to have *a generation of depressed people*" (ibid. *60 Minutes II*, emphasis added).

A Christian youth respects the fact that his or her body is "the temple of the Holy Spirit," belonging to God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Where does the neurotransmitter dopamine come from? It is stored in its own neurons, which are "ordered" open by MDMA in the same way that it forces the release of serotonin. When forced open, dopamine's storage neurons are damaged in a way that affects motor control. "Damage to these neurons is the underlying cause of the motor disturbances seen in Parkinson's disease" (ibid. NIDA Infofax, p. 1).

The NIDA also reports that recent findings link MDMA use to long-term damage to those parts of the brain critical to thought and memory. It cites research on monkeys exposed to MDMA for only four days that suffered brain damage that was evident *six to seven years later* (ibid.).

It's too soon to tell with absolute certainty what all of the long-term consequences of taking MDMA will be. But, it's fair to say that ecstasy is no "hug drug."

Evidence "against the safety of MDMA has mounted to a point where even those who once thought the drug safe are getting anxious" (op. cit., Szalavitz). Szalavitz quotes Dr. John Morgan, a City University of New York pharmacologist who initially believed that most people had little to worry about toxicity of the drug. Dr. Morgan has changed his mind. He now says, "at this point there is really not much criticism possible [of the human neurotoxicity data on MDMA]...*the time to worry is now*" (op. cit. Szalavitz, emphasis added).

Christian youth just say, "NO!"

For the Christian, to use or not to use ecstasy is a no-brainer. People who allow their appetites, social pressures and fads to determine their behavior, *will use drugs*. Listed with other common behaviors of people who "go with the flow," is "sorcery" (Galatians 5:19-21). The Greek word used, *pharmakeia*, encompasses other meanings, but one is drug use. Our English word *pharmacology* comes from it. Given the fact that human nature has a penchant for drug use, and that our present world has a multibillion dollar drug market that panders to peoples' desires, only young people of sound mind and character will have the strength not to use drugs.

A Christian youth respects the fact that his or her body is "the temple of the Holy Spirit," belonging to God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Health is something to be jealously guarded and maintained, for our bodies are not ours to trash. We need to learn to manage life. Read about some of those ways in our booklet [Making Life Work](#).

Apart from the physical considerations, there are legal ones. It's a serious crime to manufacture or sell ecstasy. That's enough to warn off a Christian youth, who lives by the creed, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God.... For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.... Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath [legal consequences] but also for conscience' sake" (Romans 13:1, 3, 5).

Since June 1985, DEA regulations put ecstasy in the Schedule 1 classification of the Controlled Substances Act--a classification generally used for dangerous narcotics that have a high potential for abuse and *no medical usefulness*. (Other Schedule 1 drugs include heroin and LSD.) Manufacturers and sellers of Schedule 1 drugs are subject to fines of up to \$125,000 and 15-year prison terms, but legislation has been proposed that would strengthen these penalties.



Hopefully, anyone who is drawn to the alluring reputation of ecstasy will think twice in light of these cold, hard facts. Parents of high school and college students should realize that their children regularly receive flyers inviting them to raves, with an "e" printed on the flyer that announces to all that ecstasy will be available. Talk with your children about e.

Is ecstasy a hug drug? The ecstasy it delivers is only a tempting illusion. So much hype. Such a big lie. And such a terrible price to pay for believing it...

Do You Know Your Father?

By Doug Horchak

A physical father is a type of our spiritual Father. How can we come to understand our spiritual Father better?



MOST PEOPLE SPEND THE FIRST 18 TO 20 YEARS of their lives with their parents. What I know of my dad I learned during the time I spent with him as a young boy growing up. At age 5, I really didn't think about my relationship with him in a very serious way. As I look back, however, virtually everything I know about my father--how he walked, how he talked, how he thought, what he liked and what he excelled at--I learned by *spending time* doing things and talking with him as a small boy.

As a young boy

Some of my fondest memories were of the trips we took in the summer months to go fishing for brook trout in the streams of northwest Michigan. After deciding on the weekend we would go, my father would plan ahead for the food and bedding, prepare the old tent we had and gather the fishing tackle and gear we would need. We didn't have much in terms of fancy equipment, but my father used what we had. Dad taught us the basics of fishing--from baiting and setting the hook, to caring for the small trout after we

caught them. While my brothers and I were always excited about the prospect of actually catching the fish, I learned many things about my dad and his personality when we spent time together on these fishing trips.

Of course, the camping and fishing trips during the months of summer were not the only occasions I had for learning about my dad. My father was a real "Mr. Fix-it." He was a household handyman that seemed to know all of the basics of carpentry, plumbing and mechanics. At the time, it seemed he could fix almost anything. He taught me the value of preparation for a work project and the importance of doing a job right the first time. Of course, part of the reason I remember that "lesson" so well is that, as a young boy, I occasionally didn't do things right the first time, and often paid the price!



Nonetheless, as I look back, at an early age I really didn't really set out to have or build a "relationship" with my dad. As with most children, the relationship just happened. As a toddler and as a young boy, my dad was a part of my life in many ways. And the many hours spent with him during those formative years often made me want to be like him.

Of course, my dad was human. He wasn't perfect. He had shortcomings as all of us do. Yet despite those, I remember some of the qualities he had that I unconsciously tried to imitate. That is true with most children as they grow up.

Another Father

While the relationship with my dad took years to build, in time I came to learn that there is another Father concerned about me and active in my life. When I was very young, I had little firsthand knowledge of this "other Dad." This other Dad was involved in my life long before I fully realized. The other "Father" I am talking about is God--the Creator of the universe.

While the relationship with my dad took years to build, in time I came to learn that there is another father concerned about me and active in my life.

When a young person first hears about the need to *have a personal relationship with God*, they often ask (with good reason) how someone is supposed to have a "relationship" with a being that they have never met, cannot see and have not heard! That question has plagued mankind for centuries and continues to affect the way human beings view the entire concept of God. History has shown that despite humanity's ignorance of the true God, mankind is, nonetheless, searching for meaning to his existence and does not want to believe we are alone in the universe.

Close encounters

In recent years, there were a few movies that illustrated mankind's passion for having contact with other intelligence or beings in the universe. The most famous of these movies were Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters* and *E.T.* The intriguing thing about these movies was the fictional portrayal of humanity realizing that they were not alone

in the universe. These motion pictures were an immediate hit at the box office and were an example of the deep curiosity in people and the strong desire of humanity to believe that we are not alone.

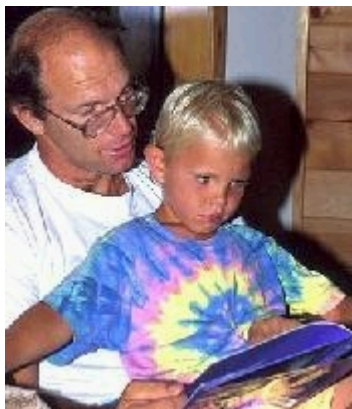


More recently, the movie *Contact* depicted a young scientist's passion for understanding the universe and her quest for finding "extraterrestrial" life. In the end, the main character, played by actress Jodie Foster, had "contact" with the supreme intelligence of the universe--a god-like being that informed her that mankind was not alone and there was a greater purpose for their existence in the universe. The plot and storyline of the movie ended with many unanswered questions. Yet it was another example of man's longing to understand his existence and communicate with "other intelligence" in our universe. Man does not like the idea of "being alone."

Man is not alone

But...human beings *can* know they are not alone in this vast universe. The apostle Paul explained that one of the great "proofs" of God's existence was the physical creation around us. In Romans 1:19-20, Paul said, "Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

Those of you that have an understanding of the true God should pursue an active relationship with Him. While God, His power and His plan are as real as the sun that rises and sets every day--without making an effort to have a real relationship with Him, one cannot hope to have a living realization of His part in our everyday lives.



When I was young, before I began to have a knowledge of the true God, I was taught that any communication or relationship with God had to be through the clergy or another human being. In essence, I was taught that I *could not* have a "personal" relationship with my Creator--but only a distant one through human mediators and a religious hierarchy. That is where my understanding of "a relationship with God" actually was formed. However, despite all of the fiction and mystery surrounding man having "contact" with a higher power, establishing actual contact and building a personal relationship with our creator God can be achieved by following the same principles we have learned on the human level.

Communication and time are the key

Developing a relationship with God is not so different from developing a relationship with anyone else. You must spend time together. You must share your intimate thoughts, feelings and desires. You must connect. You must listen.

While these actions may seem obvious (especially as it relates to interaction we have with friends), spending time talking and sharing your innermost feelings and needs is vital in establishing a relationship with God. But how and where does one start? How do we communicate with God and what do we talk about?

How the Bible explains it

Actually, the Bible provides a clear answer. A passage that is central in explaining a relationship with God is in the book of Matthew. In this passage, Jesus is teaching His disciples (followers who are learning from Him) how to pray. Prayer was not unknown at that time, but many people prayed to idols or simply recited words over and over. Unfortunately, many people still do that today in the name of their god.

Christ's disciples wanted to know how to communicate with the Father. Jesus gave them this example in an outline or "model prayer" in Matthew 6:9: "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

A personal relationship with our Creator God can be achieved by following the same principles we have learned on the human level.

The first two words of this model prayer tell us a great deal about relationships. Notice that Jesus starts out with the word *our*, not the word *my*. The reason is that God is not only the Father of the person praying, but of many others also. In this context, the *our* includes the relationship with other people who truly look to Him. It includes those people of God's Church. In that sense, Christ's model for prayer assumed our relationship with other brethren as our spiritual family in His Church.

In addition, the word *Father* implies a unique relationship with God. Note that the relationship is not that of a wife to a husband, two people dating one another or a neighbor to another neighbor. It is the relationship of a child to a father.

Establishing the relationship

There are some religions that teach that your "contact" with God must go through another person. The Bible says that is simply not true. You can talk to God directly through prayer. That is, praying is a way of talking to God. The Bible tells us that God listens to our prayers, and we can use the model prayer above to get us started. You will notice it basically contains four parts:

- Recognition of God as creator--*realizing to whom we are speaking* .
- Requests made of God--*expressing our needs*.
- Asking for forgiveness--*acknowledging our mistakes and need to change*.
- Requests to keep us from temptation--*asking for God's protection and guidance in life*.

In recognizing God as our creator and provider--it is also vitally important to be

reminded of the many blessings that really do come from Him. Thankfulness and appreciation are very important elements in our communication with God as well. "Giving *thanks always* for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," says Paul in Ephesians 5:20.

So many people have been brought up believing that God wants or even requires words in prayer to be eloquently composed, with an adequate number of "thees" and "thous"! This is not the case. God is one that looks upon the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Your sincerity when talking to God is the most important element of your communication. While the Bible talks about the advantage of praying in a private place, God wants to hear from us anytime and anywhere, whenever we have the need to talk with Him.

The Bible is God's communication

You may say to yourself that you have talked to God, but wondered why He has never talked to you. That's a good question that does have an answer. God speaks to us through the Bible. The Bible was provided by God through His servants so that you could know who God is, what God is like, how God thinks and how He feels. The Bible is God's instruction book and His "Word." It is one of God's main ways of "speaking" to those that seek Him, those that desire to communicate and have a relationship with Him.

But that relationship will be incomplete unless we begin to listen to Him by reading His Word--the Bible.

Praying to God is essential, but that relationship will be incomplete unless we begin to listen to Him. We listen to Him by reading His Word--the Bible. God's Word provides answers to many of the tough questions of life, in addition to giving us advice on how to live.

To get to know more about the Bible, send for our free booklet, [*Is the Bible True?*](#)

Take time with Him

All of you reading this article have a father. While there may be some exceptions, many of you came to know your dads during the time that you spent together. You can have a growing relationship with your spiritual Father, as well. The more time we spend with God, the more we get to know Him--and the more we will want to model our lives after Him. Whether we have realized it or not, God is already involved in our lives. As His children, we need to take the time to begin talking with Him to build a meaningful relationship. A relationship that will last for eternity.

How to Say No (Without Losing Your Friends)

By Graemme Marshall

Sometimes if you don't say no you can end up hurting yourself. The challenge is in learning to say no without offending others and losing friends.



HOW OFTEN ARE YOU faced with situations where you know you should say no, and you may even want to say no, but you don't? For many of us, it happens often, maybe even virtually every day. So how do we deal with such situations?

Our difficulty often lies in our not wanting others to think badly of us, so we find it hard to say no. Yet, if we refuse to say no, we can end up getting in trouble or hurting ourselves or others. We can get taken advantage of by failing to say a polite but firm no.

Consider some of the pained rationalizations and excuses you've probably heard:

- "I knew he was driving too fast, but I didn't know what to do about it."
- "I knew it was illegal to drink, but the others wanted to."
- "I didn't want to buy it, but the salesclerk pressured me."
- "I didn't agree with the group, but I didn't want to stand out as different."
- "I shouldn't have given in, but everyone else was doing it."

Situations like these often place us in compromising positions with our beliefs and standards, family rules or personal desires. But there are reasonable and friendly ways of saying no. The next time you're faced with the dilemma of knowing you should say no, consider some of the following advice and responses.


Go by the rules

Put your refusal on an impersonal basis. This helps counter the problem of being

pressured into something, whether at school or with friends. When faced with invitations to smoke, try drugs or alcohol, cheat or engage in immoral or illegal activity, explain that your family set specific rules that you choose to follow. So, the answer has to be no. It may be hard at first, but often you'll find that your friends will respect you more when you take a stand against such things.

Going by the rules can also help when faced with people who drive dangerously, drink illegally or otherwise exert an unwanted influence over you.

An excellent example, expressed lyrically, is found in Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical production "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat." It takes us back to the biblical story of Joseph, a talented, good-looking young man who, though a slave, managed the estate of Potiphar, an Egyptian nobleman. Things were going well for the young man until the nobleman's wife tried to seduce him.

The scene with the woman goes this way: "Joseph's looks and handsome figure, Had attracted her attention, Every morning she would beckon, 'Come and lie with me love.' Joseph wanted to resist her, Till one day she proved too eager, Joseph cried in vain, 'Please stop, I don't believe in free love.'" 

The biblical account describes how she repeatedly tried to seduce Joseph. But he resisted, telling her: "There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he [her husband] kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9).

But she persisted. "So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside" (verses 10-12).

After his repeated refusals to engage in adultery, to betray not only his master but his God, Joseph has only one option: to literally run from that evil!

This incident is echoed millennia later in the apostle Paul's words: "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Joseph politely refused when pressured by the boss's wife to do wrong. He didn't weaken about what he knew was right. Her proposal would have been against the rules of Joseph's spiritual Father--God.

Joseph simply didn't allow that sort of thing in his values and lifestyle. When she continued her adulterous attention toward him, he avoided the source of temptation as much as possible--he kept away from her. When she finally trapped him alone in a compromising situation, Joseph simply had to flee the scene.

The Bible records how Joseph paid a steep price for his refusal to compromise. Potiphar's wife turned around and accused Joseph of attempted rape, and he was jailed. But in the end God richly rewarded Joseph for his sterling character and refusal to give in to sin. The rest of the story tells us how Joseph eventually became the second most powerful and influential man in the kingdom of Egypt, a superpower of its day.

Say no by showing what needs to be done for a yes

What do you do when a salesperson pressures you to buy something you do not want? You might explain that if you are shown the exact thing you want, in the color and style you want, and for the right price, then you might buy.

Don't give in to doing things against your will. We can learn from the tragic love story of strongman Samson. He became romantically involved with a woman named Delilah (Judges 16:4). Caught up in steamy, heady emotions, he became entrapped through a behind-the-scenes plot. The local Philistine rulers set him up by paying Delilah to snare him (verses 5-6).

On three occasions Delilah asked Samson to reveal the secret of his great strength. For a while he successfully put her off until finally, under the pressure of constant questioning and being asked to prove his love for her, he relented.

He suffered much for it. The story's heartrending end tells the sorry consequences of giving in when he should have stayed firm to his convictions (verses 15-17, 21). God's way--the way of a good and upright life--should be a much higher priority than the pressures that try to make us give in.

Be firm when right is right and don't yield to wrong

When others suggest something that you can't do, or don't want to do, offer some alternatives. Tell them, "I'm sorry, but I just can't do that. However, I'd be glad to join you if you'd like to try this other idea instead." You may just end up saving the entire group a lot of trouble.

Say no by asking others to walk in your shoes

One way you can courteously refuse is by helping other people appreciate your problem in having to say no. After all, what would they do if they had your homework to complete? What would they do if they had an exam coming up and were being asked to neglect preparing for it? What would their answer be if they had to face your priorities?

Explain to others that your refusal is the proper and sensible thing to do at the time. This helps reasonable people understand why you have to say no to their request.

Along with asking others to walk in your shoes, it also helps to try and walk in theirs. It's also wise to avoid coming across as if you are better than they are.

When faced with the need for a delicate refusal without hurting others' feelings, be firm but kind. If being enticed to go against your principles, be strong in character to choose right and say no to wrong. Remember that a refusal is more readily accepted when given in a warm and friendly manner.

So, when faced with having to say no, do it gracefully--and add a smile!

Virtuous Lady of Acts

By Joan Osborn

Some people's performances are so special that they warrant immortal mention in the Bible.



Katherine Rowland

IN THE CITY OF JOPPA, one of the disciples of the Lord lay dying. Despite the diligent care of the other disciples and perhaps the physicians, the disciple died. The body was prepared for burial and laid in an upper room of the house. From the few brief words we have of this account in Acts 9, it all appears to have happened rather quickly.

The brethren in Joppa were greatly saddened by the death. Having heard that the apostle Peter was in Lydda, a city close to Joppa, they sent for him to come to them. Perhaps they hoped that he would attend to any funeral service that would be performed. Perhaps they had heard of the healing he had performed at Lydda and hoped for another such miracle. Whatever their intentions, we are told that Peter did come to Joppa, and he was the instrument God used to raise the disciple Dorcas from the dead.

This event was momentous. It happened early in New Testament church history sometime shortly after Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus. It had great impact on the people in the city of Joppa. Acts 9:42 tells us that it became known throughout Joppa and many believed in the Lord.

This event was important to the early church. People could actually see Dorcas after her resurrection and speak with her. She was a walking advertisement of God's truth and power. The account has been left in the Bible as a memorial to her. But I believe it is the works of her life rather than this resurrection that set the greater example for us.

Acts 9:36 tells us, "At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did." These deeds were so

*Dorcas was a doer
of the word and not
a hearer only.*

well known that God inspired Luke to include them in the book of Acts.

When Peter arrived at Dorcas' house, the widows of the church there surrounded him and began to show him all the garments Dorcas had made for them. This tells us something about Dorcas as a Christian. Dorcas was a doer of the word and not a hearer only.

She gave of herself to help others in several ways. Let's consider the aspect of time. Making clothes in the first century must have been very time consuming. There were not any sewing machines. Everything was cut and sewn by hand. We are not given any details of how Dorcas made the many garments and tunics that she did. Is it possible she wove the material herself? Did she spin the various threads or yarns also? In any case, Dorcas gave of her time to those she made clothing for. Romans 12:1 admonishes us to become living sacrifices. What is our life but time?

What about her talent? Not everyone can sew. I work at sewing, but I don't do it very well. I don't possess enough patience to become a craftsman. The widows who were showing Peter the things Dorcas had made seemed very proud of them. They were probably beautifully made. She must have been very talented, and she used that talent to serve others.

We all have different talents. Talent is more than singing, dancing or sewing. These are good talents to have and use. Did you realize it was a talent to be able to sit and just listen to someone who needs to talk? That's a talent anyone can cultivate.

Dorcas also shows us an example of tender care. It was the widows of the church that came to Peter and showed him the things Dorcas had made. Widows needed special consideration and Dorcas knew this. Remember Acts 9:36 said that Dorcas did charitable deeds. We are not told that Dorcas sewed for her living. It's possible that these garments were made and just given to whomever was in need.

Proverbs 30:20 says that the virtuous woman "extends her hand to the poor. Yes, she reaches out her hand to the needy." There are many times when a simple phone call, card or visit are just the reaching out or the tender care an individual may need.

...people still need our time, our talent and our tender care in our 20th century society. The disciples who sent for Peter implored him to come, and the widows were weeping when Peter arrived. The people of Joppa obviously loved Dorcas very much. She loved them and served them in many ways. One author that I read put it this way. "The works of Dorcas were recognized in the feeling which the Christian community experienced when Dorcas was gone. They remembered her self-consuming service, her compassion, her faithfulness, her charity. They knew that they had lost their dearest friend. The picture of these people gathered about her in her room weeping does not describe people who are sorry for the things and service they have lost but because they had lost one whom they love." (Harold J. Ockenga, *Women Who Made Bible History*, 1962, pp. 224-225)

Dorcas gave time, talent and tender caring to others. And because of this she is immortalized as someone "full of good works." The apostle James would later write, "what does it profit my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself if it does not have works is dead."

The world is a busy place. Lives have become complicated. It often seems to take all our energy just to get ourselves through the day. But we need to remember this example of Dorcas. There are many things we can do for others.

They need not be as complicated as making clothing. They can be as simple as giving a phone call to an elderly shut-in or a few items of food to a local food pantry. We live in different times and different physical circumstances. But people still need our time, our talent and our tender care in our 20th century society. Let's learn from the example of Dorcas.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

All Spiritual Experiences Are Not of God

By Larry J. Walker

"I FELT COMMUNION, PEACE, OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE.... [There was] an awareness and responsiveness to God's presence around me, and a feeling of centering, quieting and nothingness [as well as] moments of fullness of the presence of God...permeating my being." Sister Celeste, a Franciscan monk, gave this account of how she felt during a 45-minute prayer.

"There was a feeling of energy centered within me...going out to infinite space and returning... There was a relaxing of the...mind, and an intense feeling of love. I felt a profound letting go of the boundaries around me, and a connection with some kind of energy and state of being that had a quality of clarity, transparency and joy." This is how a scientist described the moment of peak transcendence while practicing Tibetan Buddhist meditation.

Both of these accounts are considered "spiritual experiences" because they transport the individual into a euphoric state that transcends the boundaries of normal human experience.

Both accounts have another thing in common. They were part of a scientific study in a new science called "neurotheology," which examines religious experiences in the context of neurobiology. New research technology allows scientists to document and observe the effects of "spiritual" experiences on different areas of the brain.

Researchers explain the need for certain parts of the brain to become deactivated in order to achieve this transcendental state. Intense concentration on an isolated object or thought, or repetitive events such as chanting can accomplish this effect. Rituals tend to focus the mind and block out sensory perceptions, resulting in a disconnection of the orientation area of the brain that conveys a sense of time and space.

The result is similar to a hypnotic state, in which the person loses his or her awareness of self and physical reality. The person has temporarily lost control of his or her senses. Scientists term this "dissociation." The affected areas of the brain show up on brain scans as darkness similar to rolling blackouts in California, in the words of one researcher.

Scientific testing has indeed documented the validity of paranormal experiences. But science cannot determine the source of these phenomena.

Many assume that any supernatural experience is of God. But as one scientist explains, "Spiritual experiences are...consistent across cultures...times...and faiths." So the Bible warns, "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1).

How do these accounts measure up to scriptural standards? Regarding spiritual gifts the Bible says, "the spirits of prophets are under the prophets' control" (1 Corinthians 14:32, New American version).

The Scriptures offer accounts of visions and dreams that God imparted to His prophets. The New Testament also describes many instances of individuals afflicted by demons, resulting in loss of control of their mind and faculties. So all supernatural experiences are not of God. Good and evil exist in the spirit realm.

Our mind is our most precious possession. We should be wary of surrendering control to anyone or anything. Instead, each human being should seek to know God through His revelation, the Holy Bible, and submit ourselves to His rulership over our lives.

Letters to the Editor

Written by the Finger of God



The VCM article presents an important insight and develops it convincingly. What a wonderful miracle to have the Ten Commandments written on one's heart--to automatically, by nature, practice the way summarized by those 10 "words"! Thanks!

-- Dale Osborne

The Amazing Engineering of the Dragonfly



Thanks for the article. I have often sat with my daughter (Alanna) at our pond feeding the fish and watching dragonflies. We talk about and imagine God's kingdom when it might be possible to ride giant dragonflies specially engineered. The only way to fly.

-- Paul and Alanna Kruse

Extending Our Hand to the Grieving, Part 2



I appreciated the comment that each additional death opens the last. I found this to be disturbingly true. In October my mother died. We had her in our home for the last seven months of her life. We invited hospice to assist us in this most difficult process. We learned to love the people who came to help care for mom. At the time she was buried, our son and his wife had their second son. We felt this was a celebration of the eternity of life. However, this celebration lasted a short six months. Our young grandson fell prey to the feared and scary SIDS in May.

I thought that I was in a very dark abyss and wondered why the experience was so intensified for me. I have always been strong and able to understand why and how I was feeling. This was not the case. But as the time has gone on, and as I read, study and pray I am coming to the understanding and peace that I long for. I have a greater understanding of the grieving process and how one cycles through the stages with differing intensities at particular times. Sometimes intensely and other times less intensely. Thank you for your insight in the effect of multiple doses of grief.

-- ohiokidz1

Child Abuse: What Kids Are Doing to Kids



This is excellent and needs to be shouted from the rooftops. I know from experience how painful this is to a child. Dr. James Dobson has written an excellent book that should be required reading for all--*Hide or Seek*.

-- Marilyn Braley, Houston, Texas

A Child's Worth



Thanks to Mr. Crow for a well-written article. As a reading tutor in an elementary school, I could appreciate the importance of making a child feel worthwhile. One of the second graders that I tutor one-on-one, received an award at the end of the marking period for being much improved in her academics. Unfortunately no parent was there to see her proudly receive the award. I was glad I was able to be there to cheer her on. It is so important to be there for our children and value them!

I'm a member of the United Church of God in the Flint, Michigan, area. I just had to tell you that I really enjoy the virtual magazine. It has proved to be both informative and uplifting.... Please express my appreciation to all the writers of VCM. Keep up the excellent work.

-- Lynne Burton

Kids Killing Kids: What Does It Mean?



My grandson was a victim of bullying.... We took him to the police, at his request, because the principal, contrary to her statement that there was zero-tolerance for violence at the school, would not take action. When the police went to see her she just shrugged her shoulders, and said, "Oh, it wasn't serious!"

My grandson had his head smacked into his desk, causing a nosebleed and a cut lip. The boy, who was twice my grandson's size, said he did it because it was fun to do! My grandson tells me when there are problems. He could have very well become an Eric Harris or Dylan Klebold. The principal chose to ignore my warning that something like that could happen here.

-- Vera Abbott, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Through Their Eyes



Please pass on my thanks to Joanne Rutis for her article "Through Their Eyes." I really like the way the author discussed serving and control. The fact that being a servant does not mean abdicating the responsibility to lead. I especially like the way she said, "We as parents serve our children." Thanks very much for a helpful insight.

-- Scott Lord, Rochester, New York

Who's Teaching Our Children



I agree with your article. However, it concerns me also about the way teachers teach children--treating them like they are creatures without value, and constantly admonishing them for all the things they do wrong and not praising them more for the good things they do.

You see, I am a teacher and a parent, and I work part-time in a school. I try to teach children through music (I am a music teacher) about love, responsibility, respect for one another and being kind not just competitive. In other words, to be caring and nurturing individuals.... I try to treat the students like they are important, and I care about them as individuals.... Thank you.

-- Lore

Letters may be edited for length and clarity.