

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

"Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God."—1 Corinthians 11:11-12

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A Century of Service From the Last Empress

By Melvin Rhodes

We can learn a lesson in leadership from a beloved lady—Britain's queen mother.



IT WAS ONE OF THOSE SMALL INCIDENTS I shall always remember, a fleeting moment that left a lasting impression.

The date: July 29, 1981. Many of you will remember it too. That was the day Prince Charles married Lady Diana Spencer. So much hope for the future was in the air that day. No one could have foreseen the tragic events that were to follow.

My lasting impression of the day had little or nothing to do with the wedding itself.

My wife and I were in England attending a church conference. The day of the wedding was the day before we were due to return to our church pastorates in Africa. I had just purchased a video recorder so I could record the royal wedding to show church members in West Africa, none of whom had television.



That lasting memory was to come after the wedding itself, when the members of the British royal family returned to Buckingham Palace in their fairy-tale, horse-drawn carriages. As the queen mother stepped down from her carriage helped by the traditional footman, she thanked him for his help. She then walked to the front of the carriage and noticeably thanked the drivers for their work.

Here was, in terms of protocol, one of the most important and respected persons in the land pausing to thank people who, in previous ages, would have been dismissed as mere servants.

The television commentator commented that the queen mother has always been noted for her courtesy and expressions of appreciation for others, for her incredible ability to make everyone around her feel he was the center of attention.

Perhaps the most highly regarded person in the land, the mother of Queen Elizabeth II (both she and her daughter are named Elizabeth) turned 100 Aug. 4.

Her formal title throughout the Commonwealth is Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. Millions of people refer to her affectionately as the queen mum.

What has made her so popular? The answer is quite simple: *her attitude of service*—not always exemplified in Britain’s long history of kings and queens.

A classic lesson about leadership

An instructive account of Jesus Christ and His disciples is recorded for us in Matthew 20. It shows us the disciples were not immune to the ambitions that plague many leaders today.

The mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, made a request of Jesus. She asked that her two sons be given the top two places in His Kingdom (verses 20-21).

Try for a moment to imagine the reaction of the other disciples. What arrogance! What gall! What an outrageous request! (Perhaps some of the others had had the same thoughts or wished they had asked first.)

In verse 24 we learn that “when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.” From their reaction it is clear they perceived that the two brothers themselves had initiated their request, using their mother for their own selfish ends.

Jesus was faced with discord among the disciples and quickly dealt with it.

His response conveys a lesson I have often reflected upon. My wife and I have lived in various countries and have observed several approaches to government. We have lived under the American and British forms of democracy as well as dictatorships in underdeveloped nations. These words of Jesus are as applicable to our world as they were 2,000 years ago.

In verse 25 He said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.”

Here Jesus reminded His followers of the order of government they were all too familiar with, the Roman system of despotic and tyrannical emperors who abused their authority, often badly treating the people. Sadly, this was the only government the disciples had known, so it was not surprising they knew little about how to govern and coveted the loftiest positions.

Jesus continued in verse 26: “Yet *it shall not be so among you*; but whoever desires to become great among you, *let him be your servant*” (emphasis added throughout).

Here Jesus taught a new concept in rulership? *servicing*. Whoever desired positions of power and authority, He said, should first learn to *serve others*. Leadership positions, according to this Jewish Teacher, are opportunities to serve others.

Ironically, many leaders begin this way—whether they are royal personages, elected officials or military men who have overthrown a corrupt government. They may have the best intentions in the world, but frequently their desire to serve soon changes into a self-serving wielding of power.

King Solomon, who reigned as king of Israel for 40 years, observed in Ecclesiastes 10:16: “Alas for you, O land, when your king is a servant, and your princes feast in the morning!” (New Revised Standard Version).

Solomon noticed that when people unused to rulership suddenly become powerful the power went to their heads—and their stomachs. After decades of deprivation they would spend much time eating and drinking, making up for the years of going without. I do not exaggerate when I say that often my wife and I saw new leaders take power and add substantially to their weight during their first six months in office.

Solomon records an advantage of leaders who are trained from birth: “Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles, and your princes feast at the proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness!” (verse 17).

A true leader, a real Christian leader, will remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 20: “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave [servant]—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (verses 27-28). Christ set all leaders an example of sacrifice, a willingness to die for those He served.

100 years of service

In a much smaller way the queen mother, deeply religious, was willing to sacrifice herself for the British people.

During what has become known as Britain’s finest hour, the country was faced with the seemingly imminent invasion by Hitler’s forces. The British government recommended she and her husband, King George VI, together with their two daughters, go to Canada. Other monarchs and political leaders had opted to flee their countries as the führer’s blitzkrieg overwhelmed their nations in just a few days.

When the king insisted on staying with his people, advisers suggested



the children go while so many other British children were leaving. The queen's response: "They could not go without me, and I could not possibly leave the king."

So they stayed and endured the horror of the blitz. When the German Luftwaffe bombed their royal residence, her response was, "I'm glad ... It makes me feel I can look the East End in the face."

The people in London's lower-class East End had taken the brunt of the bombing because London's port facilities and industries were concentrated there. Daily the king and queen would meet and encourage the people during the most difficult time in their history. Realizing the intense bombing was a prelude to invasion, the queen practiced the use of firearms on the grounds of Buckingham Palace, prepared to fight and possibly die like anyone else if the invader should come.

Even their clothes and food were rationed the same as they were for everyone else. After the war, when the royal family embarked on a thank-you tour of southern Africa, they asked for smaller portions at the official banquets. After years of rationing they could not eat the big meals set before them.



The queen mother's devotion to service began in World War I when she was a teenager at home in Scotland. With her brothers away at the front, the young Elizabeth and her mother turned part of their home into a hospital for wounded soldiers, running it themselves. There she met many soldiers from distant parts of the empire and for many years kept up a lively correspondence with some of them. Here, too, her parents entertained officers from Australia and New Zealand, giving them a break from the harshness of war.

In 1923, five years after the war was over, she married into the royal family when she wed the duke of York, the second son of King George V. She had turned down his proposals twice, not wanting to be in the limelight as a member of the royal family. She eventually accepted, consoling herself with the knowledge that his older brother David would be king when their father died.

A reluctant king and queen

But in 1936 their lives changed dramatically. In January, on the death of his father, David became king with the title of Edward VIII. By the end of the year, before his coronation, he had abdicated in favor of marrying the woman he loved (the twice-divorced Wallis Simpson) rather than accepting the awesome responsibility of kingship.

Before the end of that same year the duke of York had ascended the throne as King George VI. He and his wife were crowned, in May of 1937, king and queen of the various countries of the British Empire and Commonwealth and emperor and empress of India, a title they were to lose when India became independent 10 years later. Her role was not to rule but to be a consort to her husband. She soon realized that the best role for a queen consort was defined as "the power of doing good."

Her husband, George VI, became known as “the reluctant king.” He grew up in the shadow of his elder brother and lacked confidence. He was reserved and had a stammer, making it difficult for him to speak in public.

The only way he could take up the heavy task of kingship that befell him was “with my wife and helpmeet by my side.” Throughout his reign, his wife, Elizabeth, helped him with his speech impediment, listening to him practicing his addresses and accompanying him to official functions. Her encouragement and constant presence enabled him to fulfill his responsibilities. Even so, the stress of his role and the pressures of war aged him greatly, and he died in 1952 at age 56.

At his death the firstborn of his two daughters assumed the throne as Queen Elizabeth II, and his widow stepped into her role as queen mother.

A lesson for future monarchs

A respectful country honored the queen mother during the days and weeks leading up to her 100th birthday on August 4, 2000. Her example of steady and humble leadership is all too lacking in today’s world, just as the kind of leadership Jesus advocated was sadly missing in His day.

But this kind of servant leadership is destined to become the rule rather than the exception. The Bible foretells a time when a group of people who have been trained in the leadership Christ described will receive positions of divine authority. Revelation 5:10 tells us they will be “kings and priests to our God, and [they] shall reign on the earth.”

Revelation 20:4 further describes this as a time when the true followers of God will sit on thrones, reigning with Christ over the nations for 1,000 years.

This same Jesus, our elder brother, has revealed right principles of ruling—not as tyrannical, authoritarian dictators, nor as corrupt politicians striving for the preeminence, but as *servants*, helping the people we are given authority over, just as He served us.

Recommended reading

To learn more about the kind of leadership Jesus Christ advocated, and the principles on which it is based, be sure to request your free copies of the booklets [Making Life Work](#) and [The Ten Commandments](#). To understand how the prophesied time of godly leadership will become a reality, ask for [The Gospel of the Kingdom](#) and [You Can Understand the Bible](#), also free for the asking.

What Goes Around, Comes Around

By Janet Treadway

The examples of Saddam and Joseph teach us the importance of sowing what you want to reap.



WE HAVE ALL HEARD THE EXPRESSION, “What goes around, comes around.” As I sat and watched the news of the capture of Saddam Hussein, I quickly thought of the scripture that says you reap what you sow. Only nine months ago Saddam was a king who lived in a palace, surrounded in riches. At his capture he was found in a six-foot hole only big enough for him to fit in. For Saddam to be captured in a grave-sized hole seemed fitting for a man who was responsible for sending over 300,000 people to their graves.



Saddam, a wicked ruler, was reaping what he had sowed. How can you not think of scriptures like Proverbs 22:8, “He who sows wickedness reaps trouble, and the rod of his fury will be destroyed,” or Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” (New International Version)?

There is a story of another man who became a ruler in the Bible. His name was Joseph. Because of the jealousy of his brothers, he was sold into slavery. Joseph was also wrongly charged and sent to prison, but he held to his faith. God did not forget Joseph and, while going through his trial, Joseph was able to learn some valuable lessons of compassion and caring. Joseph found favor because of his wisdom that came from God, and he was given the second position in command.

Joseph reaped what he sowed. He sowed obedience and faithfulness to God. He was faithful and did not give in to the seduction of his boss's wife; he became a servant to those who were in prison and found favor with the jailer. The stories of Saddam and Joseph had completely different endings.

So what does this have to do with us? The principle applies to us in the fact that we do indeed reap what we sow. God allows us to make choices every day about how we will treat people, and about what we decide is right or wrong. We decide how we handle things that we are afraid of and want to run from. Greed, self-pity, arrogance, prejudice, cruelty and laziness all grow over time. We become those things through the choices we make. The opposite is also true—when we choose to trust God, we become more like Him.

For Saddam to be captured in a grave-sized hole seemed fitting for a man who was responsible for sending over 300,000 people to their graves.

Saddam and Joseph are the examples of two opposite choices made. Saddam practiced greed, murder, prejudice and cruelty. Joseph practiced love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control—the fruit of God's Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Both of these men reaped what they sowed as promised by God.

It is easy to fool people for a time (Matthew 23:27-28). You can paint a tomb so that it looks good on the outside, but inside it's full of decaying bones, much like the hole in which they found Saddam. Inside was the decayed, cruel Saddam. We can all put up a front and pretend to be good, while inwardly we decay with bitterness, hate, anger, gossip and lying. On the other hand, if we seek God and His way of life, God is formed in us. We become more and more secure in Him and build more and more of His character within us.

“For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops” (Luke 12:2-3).

There is no righteous behavior that will remain secret, and there is no unrighteous behavior that will remain secret.

Beauty is revealed as well. Three times in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly” (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18). The kindness, sincerity, integrity, goodwill, sweetness of spirit and service you have offered that no one noticed or applauded is valued. Your Heavenly Father sees it, and He will reward you. There is no righteous behavior that will remain secret, and there is no unrighteous behavior that will remain secret. The fruit is finally apparent. What you sow, you reap!

Joseph was an instrument of giving life to many people, while Saddam took innocent lives. They were at very different ends of the spectrum, because they reaped what they sowed in life.

Let's us all work very hard to sow good, to make this world a little easier for our brothers and sisters so that our Father in heaven will reward us openly.

Disbelief in the Bible: A Tragic Phenomenon and Increasing Trend

By Don Hooser

The Bible is losing its once-held prominence in the Western world. Even professing Christians seldom read God's Word.



THE LAST DECADE HAS REVEALED A TREND in Americans' approach to the Bible. According to national surveys conducted by Barna Research, in 1992 nearly half of all adults (47 percent) read from the Bible during the week. That figure plummeted to just 31 percent by 1995 then rose slightly to 36 percent in 1999. The proportion of adults who read from the Bible during the course of a week, other than when they are in church services, has declined dramatically since the early '90s.

Pollster George Gallup and Michael Lindsay cowrote a book that documents the shallowness of American Christianity. Two of the underlying themes suggested by their findings are "the glaring lack of knowledge about the Bible, basic doctrines, and the traditions of one's church ... [and] the superficiality of faith, with many people not knowing what they believe, or why" (*Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Beliefs*, 1999, p. 4).

About 93 percent of Americans have a Bible or portion of the Bible (New Testament) in their homes. However, the number of Americans who view the Bible as infallible and having authority over their lives is decreasing sharply (ibid., pp. 34-35, 50).

Christianity is increasingly disconnected from the book on which it was founded.

“Most Americans consider the Bible to be a collection of inspired writings, but ‘not everything in it should be taken literally.’ This move toward understanding the Bible as the inspired, and not necessarily as the actual, word of God, is one of the most dramatic shifts in religious beliefs since the 1960s. As recently as 1963, two persons in three viewed the Bible as the actual word of God, to be taken literally, word for word. Today, only one person in three still holds to that interpretation” (ibid., pp. 35-36).

Surveys reveal how little the average American knows about the Bible. The religion section of *The Dallas Morning News* on Nov. 27, 1999, featured an article on the declining readership of the Bible. The headline read: “Who Reads It? Fewer and Fewer, Say Those Bemoaning Bible Illiteracy.” The article noted that, when quizzed on simple basic questions about the Bible, most people score poorly, even though most of them own Bibles.

Unbelief in Europe has been growing for decades. Northern Europe has long been known as the “North German Plain of Irreligion.” Serious Bible reading is definitely on the wane—likewise living by its values.

Christianity is increasingly disconnected from the book on which it was founded, while forces hostile to Christianity grow ever stronger. As a result, scholars have described the late 20th century as the post-Christian era, and some say we are entering an anti-Christian era.

Brief upturn in Bible interest

In spite of these trends, 1999 saw an upsurge in interest in the Bible. What sparked it? Largely the fears and hopes associated with the approaching year 2000. People expressed a mix of secular and spiritual fears—apprehension about possible Y2K computer malfunctions, terrorism, a possible stock market slump with major financial losses, conspiracies, apocalyptic events climaxing in Armageddon, and the fear of many that they weren’t ready to meet their Maker.



There were hopes too. Many hoped for a large-scale spiritual revival. Many hoped the dawn of the year 2000 would see the second coming of Christ and the ushering in of the messianic millennium.

These fears and hopes were stirred up by what preachers and authors were saying about the Bible rather than what the Bible actually says. Listeners and readers were led to believe messages that were a mixture of truth and error. This eventually led to disappointment and disillusionment. Tragically, as people lose trust in sermons and books that are misrepresented as being firmly rooted in the Bible, they tend to lose trust in the Bible itself.

But Bible teachers are not the only ones to blame for biblical illiteracy. Christ wants us to be His disciples, and a disciple is a student. Bible students need to read the textbook for themselves.

Paul and Silas’s audience in Berea had the ideal attitude and approach: “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Why apathy toward the Bible?

Why have we seen an overall decline in respect for and readership of the Bible?

Several factors are at work. First, our very nature—our tendency to be self-centered and to act as if we were independent of God’s authority over us—is a constant pull away from God’s law and way of life (Romans 8:7).

Second, we are heavily influenced by an increasingly secular society and the perception that the Bible is irrelevant—a perception craftily encouraged by a powerful spirit being, Satan the devil, who “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). He is always at work to discredit the Bible and the concept of absolute truth.



Third, when people prosper, they tend to forget God and His purpose for mankind. An easy life makes it easy to forget the Bible. As financial confidence increases, reliance on God wanes. The year 2000 started with a booming economy and great optimism for continued prosperity. But devotion to materialism is a mortal enemy of true spirituality.

God warned the Israelites that once they were in the Promised Land they would be inclined to forget God and not give Him credit for their prosperity. God warned them not to forget the true source of their prosperity, lest “you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth’” (see Deuteronomy 8:11-18).

Christ said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread [material things] alone, but by every word of God’” (Luke 4:4). But self-reliant and materialistic man foolishly tries to live by bread alone.

What can we expect for the near future? Should we anticipate further disinterest in the Bible? It’s more than likely. Based on the present spiritual disillusionment and the renewed faith in our technological society, it seems almost certain that reading, believing and obeying the Bible will continue to decline.

End-time secular society

What does the Bible itself reveal about the spiritual conditions and attitude toward God and the Bible in the end time? What will be the consequences, and what can we do to prepare for Christ’s return?

Jesus tells us: “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37-39).

When people prosper, they tend to forget God and His purpose for mankind.

Jesus predicted that many people would live rather normally, actively and comfortably until only a short time before He would suddenly intervene. The scene He describes is one of prosperity, with no apparent sense of alarm, no wake-up call to search the Scriptures.

We know that in the days of Noah “the wickedness of man was great in the earth” (Genesis 6:5). So Christ was warning that the way of life of many in the end time would be wicked as well. Many would be contemptuous of the Word of God.

Jesus asked, “When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8, Revised Standard Version). His question implies that doubt will outweigh faith, with relatively few exceptions.

Prophecies of spiritual apathy

Paul describes people’s focus in the last days: “... For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God ...” (2 Timothy 3:1-4). The list doesn’t indicate many will be lovers of God’s Word.

Verse 5 tells us that many will have “a form of godliness” but deny its power. Gallup polls show that, although Americans want “spirituality,” they don’t necessarily want it to be Bible-based. According to recent surveys, “the percentage of Americans who say they feel the need in their lives to experience spiritual growth has surged 24 points in just four years—from 58 percent in 1994 to 82 percent in 1998” (ibid., p. 1).

But people seek spirituality through various forms and methods, through countless Christian and non-Christian religions and customized combinations of beliefs and practices. “The United States is brimming with ... myriad religious faiths [and] ... diverse foreign ideologies and philosophies ... The options for those religious convictions will become even more manifold than they are today” (ibid., p. 23).

The scene He describes is one of prosperity, with no apparent sense of alarm, no wake-up call to search the Scriptures.

It is sad that the true religion God reveals in His Word—the one with real power—is losing favor and growing rare.

In 2 Timothy 3:7 Paul adds that some will be “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Compare this with Jesus’ definition of truth in His prayer to His Father: “Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

Many people have inquiring minds, but much of their inquiry is the pursuit of the trivial and the tantalizing. Those who seriously search for truth and the meaning of life often fail to look for it in the right place—the Holy Scriptures.

But this, too, was prophesied. “For the time will come when ... they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Paul warned the church at Thessalonica about conditions in “that Day”—the time at which Jesus Christ would decisively intervene in human affairs. He said many would be deceived “because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 9-10).

Be the exception!

The good news is that we can be exceptions, different from the complacent, uncaring masses in these last days. We have the wonderful opportunity to develop “the love of the truth”—a love of God’s Word—that will keep us from being deceived as we approach the end of the age.

But how can this happen?

Significantly, the longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119, is devoted to praising God for His Word and His laws. Its writer exults, “Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day” (verse 97). Each of us can develop this same love and reverence for God’s Word.

The world is falling asleep spiritually, but we can choose to stay awake and alert and aware of trends.

The world is falling asleep spiritually, but we can choose to stay awake and alert and aware of trends. As Paul says, “Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:6). To “watch” means to be spiritually alert and attentive, like a sentry or watchman.

Paul tells us to “put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11). Then Paul lists the pieces of God’s armor, including “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (verses 14-18). God’s Word is our chief weapon in our spiritual warfare against the forces of evil.

God gave us His Word to serve as the foundation for all knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Those who are wise will replace aversion to study with an earnest desire to study. Jesus said that “blessed are those who hear [read and understand] the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28).

How to be ready

At the right time Jesus Christ will suddenly intervene with apocalyptic judgments and actions. People are skeptical, thinking such will never happen. They think: I’ve heard that too many times before, and it never happened.

The apostle Peter predicted that “scoffers will come in the last days ... saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming?’” (2 Peter 3:3-4).

You may remember how in the familiar Aesop fable, the townsfolk became skeptical after the shepherd boy repeatedly cried, “Wolf, wolf!” when there was no wolf. By the time a real wolf threatened, the people would not believe the boy’s cry for help.

There have been countless false teachings and misunderstandings about Bible prophecy. Nevertheless Bible prophecy is true. Jesus promised He will return, and He will. It is a tragedy that many think the true preaching of prophecy is a mere cry of “wolf.”

It is a tragedy that many think the true preaching of prophecy is a mere cry of “wolf.”

(For a proper prophetic understanding of events the Bible predicts in connection with the stark realities of world news and trends, be sure to request your free copies of [Are We Living in the Time of the End?](#) and [You Can Understand Bible Prophecy.](#))

The Bible is God's great gift of divine revelation to mankind. It is His handbook for life. It is the Book of Books. Let's thank God for inspiring it, preserving it and making it increasingly available and accessible throughout the world. Let's turn *to* it, not away from it.

In the Image of God

By Gary Petty

The Bible tells us humans are made in the image of God. Why, then, are they capable of so much evil? And what is the solution?



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE WROTE: "What a piece of work is a man! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action like an angel! In apprehension how like a god." Scan the newspaper headlines and you get a different concept of humanity with war, murder, terrorism, despotism ... If mankind is "in apprehension ... like a god," why can't we solve our problems?

Most people have a more cynical view of humanity than Shakespeare. On one hand, human beings are capable of artistic creativity, of brilliance in engineering and mathematics and of love, the outgoing concern for others that provides life so much of its richness and meaning. At the same time humanity is capable of hatred, destruction, prejudice and murder. All too often, it seems, people are driven by the darker side of their nature.

The Bible contains a startling statement in Genesis 1:27 where it says that man was made in the image of God. How are you made in the image of God? And if we are created in His image, why are so many people's lives filled with difficulties, broken relationships, and a feeling that God is sort of an absentee landlord in the affairs of mankind?



Obviously, human beings are finite, restricted to physical limitations and terribly flawed. However, the Bible emphasizes humanity's astounding potential. Each unique person has consciousness and awareness; the ability to reason; the capacity for a wealth of emotions such as empathy and love; creativity; and volition or will. These attributes give us the capacity to develop relationships with God and with other human beings.

What happened? How do Christians answer the critics, who rightly ask, if humanity is made in the image of a good God then how can people be so evil?

The answers are discovered in the first three chapters of Genesis. The first human beings experienced a nurturing, loving relationship with their Creator until they decided to choose for themselves the definitions of right and wrong. Through experience, human nature became a mixture of good and evil. We may be created in the image of God, but all of us have become terribly flawed images.

It's easy to view religion as a temporary emotional fix for the spiritual hunger that plagues our souls. We can then avoid facing our original purpose as image bearers of God and deny how marred we've become. All too often a bland, culturally correct Christianity allows us to continue the destructive mental processes that churns our spiritual hunger. True Christianity is more than a profession of faith in Jesus. It is the process of a person recognizing his or her corrupted nature, accepting Christ's sacrifice and submitting to God's guidance in creating a new nature.

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The roots and goals of behavior

Psychologists point out that behavior patterns are rooted in our past, but all behaviors are moving towards a goal. The goal of the behavior determines its real purpose.

Here's a made-up example. A girl is taught by her mother to brush her teeth after every meal. The girl forms a habit and carries the behavior into adulthood. It is a good behavior based on keeping her teeth clean so that she has good health and her breath isn't offensive to others. This woman has to attend a meeting and doesn't have a chance to brush her teeth after lunch. She might feel a little bad, even some guilt, but she knows that nobody can always brush their teeth so she attends the meeting where she is a productive participant.

This woman's behavior was formed in the past, it has a sound goal of good health, and it is based in the reality of sometimes you can't brush your teeth.

But what if this woman's past, present and future are a mass of confused and conflicting emotions and goals? What if her mother berated her and told her that if she didn't brush her teeth all her teeth would rot out and that she would even be uglier than she already is?

For this woman brushing her teeth has an irrational emotional attachment. Her goal isn't to have good health but to avoid overwhelming feelings of ugliness. The result is that she gets nothing out

of the meeting, nor does she give to others, because she spends the entire time obsessing about her teeth.

This is why it may be good to understand how the past formed our emotional and behavioral patterns. But changing behavior requires understanding its goal. The goal of our behavior determines how we deal with the past, live in the present and shape our futures.

Human reasoning and emotional processes are complex. Because human beings are created in the image of God, at times we express very noble motivations of self-sacrifice and giving towards others. At other times we give in to the sordid side of human nature.

Dr. Larry Crabb, in his remarkable book *Understanding People*, points out some core motivations possessed by all human beings.

First, we are relationship beings created to have meaningful interaction with God and other human beings. At the deepest inner core of our being, all of us experience a hunger for a relationship with God.

Secondly, we will do almost anything to exert independent self-determination. This drives us to protect self at all costs. This means that at the very center of our being every person is by nature hostile towards God and His solutions to our problems. The apostle Paul put it this way in Romans 8:7 "... the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be."

The goal of our behavior determines how we deal with the past, live in the present and shape our futures.

A third motivation is that we will do almost anything to avoid emotional pain and experience good feelings. This need isn't necessarily evil, but coupled with our independent selfishness, it often motivates us to abuse others or avoid solutions that require work or pain.

It doesn't take much reasoning to comprehend that these three motivations are in conflict with each other. We have a longing for God, yet we want independence from Him. We want Him to solve the problems in our lives, but we are immediately hostile towards His solutions. We need close relationships with others, but meaningful relationships involve vulnerability that opens the self to emotional pain.

The solutions to alcoholism, marriage problems, anxiety, nonorganic depression, addiction to pornography, unresolved anger are all in the Instruction Book. But we resist God's instructions because we will do almost anything to maintain independent rulership over our own lives and avoid discomfort.

The reality is that any authentic, positive change involves effort and pain. So we temporarily relieve our unfilled hunger for God with drugs, or an affair, or sexual fantasies, or gambling, by burning ourselves out doing good deeds, or by working hard at being religious. But in the end we still hunger for God while motivated by our desire for self-rule.

The only solution

Jesus Christ makes an extraordinary pronouncement in John 6:35 where He claims to be the “bread of life.” He goes on to say, “He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

How can the hunger each of us feels, that empty need at the core of our being, be filled?

First, we must become acutely aware of our hunger and thirst for God. Most of us spend our lives trying to fill that void with careers, or money, or selfish lifestyles.

Secondly, we must face the ugly hostility we each have for God and His solutions to life’s problems. Nothing can be solved until we are willing to say to our Creator, “I don’t know how life works, but You do.”

Thirdly, only by submitting to His rulership can we experience a deep relationship with our Creator. Here’s where many people find it easier to accept Jesus Christ as Savior, but find it more difficult to submit to Him as Lord. The Bible isn’t just a book on how to worship God, it gives us His instructions on how to live life.

This isn’t a magic formula for instance success. God creates a new nature in a person through a lifetime of change and growth. The rewards are enormous ... and eternal.

This article is based on the transcript of a Good News radio broadcast. Good News Radio is heard on stations across the country. For an Internet listing of stations and times or to download radio programs, go to <http://www.ucg.org/radio>. You can also download or request the free booklet offered on this program, [Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion](#).

The Coming Age of Grace

By Howard Davis

What will it take to rid the world of violence, prejudice and hatred?



BEFORE DAWN, I VIEWED THE TEMPLE MOUNT spread out below me with the Dome of the Rock shrouded in the shadow of the hill behind me. How often I had seen pictures of this scene. Now for the first time, in August of 2000, I stood overlooking Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives.

Accompanied by a rabbi friend, I set up my television camera to capture the first morning light on this amazing place, a site that increasingly is becoming this planet's geopolitical ground zero.



Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ looked down from the Mount of Olives and prophesied what would happen to the city and its fabulous temple within a generation (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Just as He foretold, it was wiped out less than 40 years later. Now 70,000 Jewish headstones tile the Mount of Olives' west hillside facing the Temple Mount. Those buried there await the resurrection in God's judgment.

Hundreds of years before Christ, the Hebrew prophets also spoke of our age, when Jews, after an absence of centuries, would again control Jerusalem during a tumultuous time. In biblical language perfectly describing our age—an unparalleled time of potential for terror—the prophets of old assure us the Messiah, Jesus, will come again. He will split the mountain on which I was standing. The returning Christ will bring the world a new spirit and will transform humanity.

City of peace, city of war

In only a few weeks, the risk of being stoned or shot would make it impossible for my rabbi friend and me to stand on that spot in the city's east side. The Palestinian intifada, or uprising, of 1987 began anew that September on the temple platform when enraged young Palestinians hurled rocks down on Jewish men as they prayed.

Jerusalem, a place of interminable bloodshed, is one of the world's oldest inhabited cities. The "city of peace" has experienced more titanic upheavals than any other city still standing. It survives even while sources of terror work under the veneer of civilization.

Why are people so destructive in their thinking and actions?

It is there that the deepest differences in cultures clash, doctrines about God collide, the aspirations of feuding peoples conflict, claims on major chunks of real estate compete and the grudges of centuries fester.

Little grace can be found in Jerusalem today even though Arabs and Jews descend from a common ancestor, the biblical patriarch Abraham. No divine spiritual favor works in the hearts of these cousins to overcome millennia of religious and historical differences.

Jerusalem's anguish is a crisis of the heart, submerged under the law of defective human nature—conflicted, confused and confounded in its attempts at lasting peace.

Jerusalem is, in many ways, a microcosm of the world.

Destructive thoughts, words and deeds

People have always been stuck in cultures that trap them, molding their minds and opinions and distorting their sense of what is possible and appropriate.

Often evil captivates them; they begin thinking that something evil is good. Nations blindly but willingly follow deceiving and deceived rulers.

The Bible shows that our negative spiritual environment began with Adam and Eve under the influence of mankind's common enemy, Satan, a former "covering cherub" (Ezekiel 28:16) whose name (which means "adversary") implies his adversity to God and man. Jesus appropriately called him the father of lies (John 8:44, New International Version).

Satan's influence disrupted the first family and conditioned Cain, the firstborn son of Adam and Eve, to murder his brother Abel. A world of violence and suffering continues to our time.

Throughout history destructive patterns of thought, beliefs and actions have been mankind's greatest blocks to growth and the cause of conflicts even among nations. The sad history recorded in the Bible is no different from the events of the last 2,000 years.

Why are people so destructive in their thinking and actions?

What was in the head and heart of the 21-year-old Palestinian Arab who blew himself up with 21 Jewish teenagers and young adults in June as the Sabbath evening darkened on Tel Aviv's Mediterranean beach promenade?

For years the extreme elements of the Palestinian Authority have approved school textbooks teaching children and teenagers it is a great honor and God's will to martyr themselves by the "righteous" act of killing Jews for the liberation of Jerusalem. As a result, many are willing to die with the promise of a heavenly reward.

On hearing of his son's martyrdom, the father extolled his suicide as a righteous act. He said he wished he had many more sons who would do the same.

These horrific actions flow from teachings and beliefs ingrained from early childhood. Tragically, conflicts are often kept alive by political and community leaders claiming to be messiahs sent to conquer the enemies of the people. Their relentless agenda to sustain conflict buttresses their status as leaders.

Many Muslims are not in favor of suicide bombings, and some Muslim clerics have spoken out against them as an offense to Islam.

They assert murder and suicide are the way of God. They most assuredly are not.

Religion without excuse

Muslims, Jews and Christians cannot look to God to justify violence for their own purpose. For instance, the Koran is acknowledged as the most sacred text for more than one billion Muslims. It recognizes the law God gave Moses as universal, the Old and New Testaments as sacred texts and Jesus as a prophet.

The Bible condemns murder. The Ten Commandments state, "You shall not murder." The teachings of Jesus of Nazareth go much further. He said: "... Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven ..." (Matthew 5:44-45).

Many Muslims are not in favor of suicide bombings, and some Muslim clerics have spoken out against them as an offense to Islam. But hatred runs deep on both sides. An intelligent Jewish man studying at a Jerusalem religious school shocked me as we walked toward the ancient Western Wall, where hundreds of Jews prayed under the Friday night floodlights.

"A good Arab is a dead Arab," he told me.

He was as far from the truth of God as the Palestinian suicide bomber. Peace will not come while the hearts of men are blinded by prejudice and humanly perverted assertions about the will of God.

The Bible says God is love, and Jerusalem is His city, the very place where Christ gave His life to atone for the sins of the world. Surrounded by violence, it is there the greatest voice for peace was violently stilled. It was there prophets of peace proclaimed their messages. They spoke of a time of God giving peace, love and harmony to Jerusalem and the world. Yet today its environs are engulfed by hate.

What will bring an end to the violence?

It may be too hard for the cynical to believe, but one day, hopefully soon, God will pour a divine blessing on humanity, starting at Jerusalem.

Let's consider in more detail what is necessary for lasting peace, even though humanly impossible.

Religion must change

False teaching about God and His will inspires wars, separates families and confuses billions of people. The competing doctrines, hierarchies of religious personalities and practices of Christianity, Judaism and Islam are a continuing cause of conflict. Add to the mix, Buddhism, Hinduism, various philosophies, psychologies and atheism, and we have a world rife with spiritual divisions.

People will have to admit they were wrong and be corrected for their errors.

The hearts of the six billion people alive today cannot agree about the most important issues of life. Religions claim to yearn for unity, brotherhood and a collective higher purpose. But organized religion of every stripe and hue offer up confusing humanly devised traditions and doctrines passed off as divine truth. These divisions foster bigotry, hatred and wars.

For humanity to become as one, religious divisions must be abolished through acceptance of a set of common God-inspired teachings about God, good and evil and the purpose of human life. Everyone must accept this godly truth; it must become the reality for everyone.

All people must be taught the same values and religion through their schools, other institutions and popular culture right down to individual families.

But a universal religion cannot be universally adhered to without a universal spiritual *willingness* to agree. For all to agree requires that all have a willingness to change—to give up false and harmful teachings and practices they've previously accepted.

Beliefs are among the most difficult patterns of the mind to change. People will have to admit they were wrong and be corrected for their errors. There is the rub.

To admit that your beliefs are fatally flawed and your actions fundamentally evil is an admission that human nature universally resists. People refuse to acknowledge their sins, false beliefs and attitudes even to the point of death and suicide.

Consider the extreme case of Hitler's Third Reich. Many Germans were willingly deceived by the Nazis, but not all. Hitler removed Germans who opposed him, imprisoning and murdering them right under the noses of the German people. The systematic elimination of the Jewish people proceeded within view of parts of the general population. As Hitler destroyed Germany, he refused to acknowledge his lies and eventually committed suicide rather than admit to the unfathomable evil he had perpetrated.

People want to be governed with governments and leaders that will benefit them and allow them to prosper.

Although much less dramatic, men and women of every culture stick to their prejudices. We refuse to admit where our wrongs have led us or to make the changes we need to make. We make excuses, pointing to others worse than we are. We blindly justify behaviors that hurt others and ourselves.

It will take an act of God to soften men's hearts to be able to forgive one another. It will take an act of God for humanity to practice loving concern toward all. It will take an act of the Creator for

all to accept the one true God and the purpose and truths of His Word. These things are humanly impossible, but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).

Recognizing a common authority

After so many failures, we shouldn't be surprised that people have grown cynical about the ability of world leaders to change humanly devised governments. And with good reason! Yet the peoples of the Middle East and the world must ultimately respect and accept a common authority for global peace and prosperity to flower. That is why the biblical promise of the Kingdom of God is so significant.

People want to be governed with governments and leaders that will benefit them and allow them to prosper. Residents of one nation don't want others to control their nation. A universal government to which all voluntarily submit for the good of all is humanly impossible.

It will take an act of God to grant perfect government for *all* people. Such a government must be devoid of selfish leaders driven by ignorance, sectarian interests and hidden agendas. The prophets, Jesus and His apostles agree that such a government will come, but it will not lie in the hands of man.

Grace pouring out

Mankind's greatest challenge is for the heart, the inner being, the deepest motivation, to change from its innate selfishness, self-absorption and hostility against the law of God. The challenge is to accept and live by that law, the expression of God's righteousness and love.

Arab and Jewish Israelis, Palestinians, Americans, Germans, Russians, Chinese and all other peoples display attitudes and actions of underlying selfishness. Although all say they care about the welfare of others, the reality is that all nations function under a fundamentally selfish philosophy. Arrogance suffuses human religion. Christians, Jews and Muslims all believe they are inherently closer to God and have divine rights as the superior group in God's eyes.

God will not leave mankind alone in its helplessness to change its most fundamental motivations. In His own time, He will transform mankind, abolishing the selfishness and traditions that divide Jew and Arab and all humanity. God will begin this change in Jerusalem, the capital city of global contention.

“Behold,” says God through the prophet Zechariah, “I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples ... The LORD will save the tents of Judah first ... And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication ...” (Zechariah 12:2-10).

I quoted this passage to my rabbi friend on the Mount of Olives on that silent dawn before the current intifada began. Looking down on the Temple Mount and the Dome of the Rock, I said: “The spirit of grace will begin to be poured out here. Humanity



has never experienced this. The Jewish people have never been converted in this way. Christianity has never been converted in this way, otherwise Catholics and Protestants wouldn't have been killing one another and Jews for centuries.”

I continued: “When it happens, this grace will establish the law of God in the hearts of humanity for the first time. The population of the world will be systematically converted to God, nation by nation, and it will begin right here for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This grace will transform the world.”

“You are right,” my rabbi friend said as we watched the rays of morning sun begin to strike the Temple Mount.

The prophecy of Zechariah continues: “... Then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn” (verse 10).

“Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations ... And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives ...” (Zechariah 14:3-4).

As sure as the rising sun, the age of grace—in the Kingdom of God—is coming.

Four Requirements for Peace

Lasting peace and success for the world's inhabitants can come only when four changes are made in the way we all operate.

- First, a unity must come through a set of teachings direct from God about the purpose for man and the way of life leading to achieving that godly purpose.
- Second, all peoples must accept a universal authority from God, submitting themselves to His higher power.
- Third, human beings must willingly surrender their self-absorbed natures to receive a divine nature of outward concern. Such love will be based on principles of godly character.
- Fourth, God must remove the supernatural source of evil before the world can have lasting peace.

These necessary changes to society are impossible for humans to achieve alone. People refuse to agree about God, submit to a universal godly authority or fundamentally turn from their selfish words and deeds. The world is powerless to permanently remove the spiritual adversary of the human race. None of these necessary changes to the world will come about by human initiative.

The Bible explains how raw human nature brings so many problems to society and shows how God will give people the power to change.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

The Great I AM

By Hector M. Earle

The old hymn praises God, the “Great I AM.” A search of the Scriptures reveals an even deeper meaning to this intriguing name.



I SHALL NEVER FORGET my mother’s favorite hymn. I recall many times when I was a child hearing her sing, “He’s the Lord of Glory, He is the Great I AM.” It seemed that every time she hung her clothes out to dry, she would sing this grand old hymn with such assurance and conviction.

I must admit, though, I didn’t quite understand what “I AM” really meant, and why these two words were synonymous with God and Christ. Even hearing stories in my Sunday school class about “I AM”—especially the story where God told Moses to tell the Israelites He was “I AM WHO I AM” or the story in the Gospels where Jesus told the Pharisees that “before Moses was, ‘I AM’”—didn’t completely help.

It was not until later in my Christian walk, when I searched the Scriptures in more depth, that I came to understand the meaning of “I AM.” For sure enough, true to its divine form, God’s Word always interrupts itself, “here a little, there a little” (Isaiah 28:10). Today if I were to ask myself the question, “Who is the Great I AM?”, scriptures would tell me who He is.

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst ... If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever” (John 6:35, 51).

“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).

“I am the door. If anyone enters in by Me, he will be saved ... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:9-10).

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit” (John 15:1-2).

“I am the Alpha and the Omega ... who is and who was and who is to come” (Revelation 1:8).

I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” (Revelation 1:18).

“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

There are dozens of other scriptures to tell us more about the Great I AM. But I think we get the point. My mother knew it all along. It’s no wonder she sang it with such conviction. I now know, too, and join in the apostle Peter’s reply when Christ asked him, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15-16). He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That says it all.