

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

"Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"—Revelation 22:20

Volume 6 Number 4

April/May 2004

A Diamond Is Forever

By Daniel Roy Macaraeg

Page 3



Dazzling, precious diamonds can help us more clearly see what God has in mind for us—as His jewels.

Unconditional Surrender

By James D. Cannon

Page 7



Nearly 60 years ago World War II ended with unconditional surrender. But unconditional surrender is not just for the history books, as it plays a vital part in our relationship with our Savior and conquering King.

“Good Story!”

By Maarten de Jong

Page 12



My boss asked me to teach history classes, and didn't mind if I taught them from a biblical perspective, even in secular Holland. But what would he think when he walked in while I was tracing the identity of the lost tribes of Israel?

Dating Disasters and Faulty Mate Selection: There Is a Better Way!

By Terry Hoffman

Page 14



Never before have bookstore shelves been so well stocked with such a variety of self-help relationship books, yet there seems to be such a dearth of understanding of how to live peaceably with one another. However, the principles of the Bible can be used to identify resources that can help prepare for a successful courtship and marriage.

How Can We Be Stronger Than Samson?

By Jessica Curry

Page 19



The story of Samson has much to teach us. The author, age 11, asks and answers important questions it seems Samson didn't fully comprehend till the end of his life.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

“Even So, Come, Lord Jesus!”

By Mike Bennett

Page 22



As we remember Christ's first coming as Savior, we can look forward eagerly to His promised return as King of Kings!

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A Diamond Is Forever

By Daniel Roy Macaraeg

Dazzling, precious diamonds can help us more clearly see what God has in mind for us—as His jewels.



HA VE YOU EVER LOOKED CLOSELY at a diamond? Nothing quite compares to its dazzling beauty, sheer elegance and fiery brilliance! It is the hardest natural substance on earth. It is, in fact, 40 times harder than a sapphire or a ruby, the next hardest minerals. Only another diamond can scratch a diamond.

A diamond is the greatest conductor of heat, is transparent over the greatest number of wavelengths, has the highest melting point (4,090 degrees Celsius—2 1/2 times greater than that of steel!) and has a refractive index greater than any naturally occurring gemstone—giving it its characteristic fire and brilliance. Diamonds are among the rarest and costliest of gemstones.

But you may ask: What magical substance is a diamond made of? Ironically, just about the same substance found in one of the softest of all minerals—the graphite in the lead of your pencil! Diamonds are pure crystalline carbon formed 200 kilometers deep within the earth millions of years ago. The elemental forces of heat and pressure transformed the carbon into diamond in the cauldron of boiling magma that lay deep below the surface of the earth. The volcanic mass in which this crystallization took place then thrust upwards and broke through the earth's surface to cool in kimberlite pipes. It is in these pipes that most diamonds are found today.

The diamond derives its name from the Greek *adamao* or *adamas*, which means “unconquerable” or “invincible.”

The diamond's "Four Cs"

But what determines the value of a diamond? In 1939, De Beers, the world's leading diamond company, popularized the "Four Cs": Cut, Color, Clarity and Carat.

Cut refers to the angles and proportions of a diamond. A diamond's cut is what gives it sparkle and fire. The better the proportions, the better the diamond is able to handle light, creating more sparkle and brilliance.

Color refers to the degree to which the diamond is colorless. The majority of diamonds range from those with barely perceptible yellow and brownish tints up to the very rare pinks, blues and greens, which are known as fancies. The best color for a diamond, however, is colorless.

Clarity refers to the presence of inclusions in a diamond. Most diamonds contain tiny inclusions or feather-like spots or imperfections, not discernible to the naked eye. The fewer and smaller they are, the less likely they are to interfere with the passage of light through the diamond, and therefore the more rare and beautiful it will be.



Carat refers to the weight of a diamond. One carat is divided into 100 points so that a diamond of 75 points weighs .75 carats (1 carat equals 200 milligrams). Two diamonds of equal weight can have very different values, depending on their cut, clarity and color.

The "Four Cs" of God's jewels

In the Bible, God calls us His jewels (Malachi 3:17). I would like to share with you the "Four Cs" of a spiritual diamond—what we should be striving to be as true Christians. These Four Cs are Conviction, Commitment, Courage and Character. They are all important—they all build upon each other.

Conviction is the degree to which one knows and believes the Word of God.

Conviction is being absolutely certain of what you believe. In Hebrews 11:6, we read: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." We must believe! We must be fully persuaded! We must not leave room for even a little doubt! That is conviction!

Such was the conviction Daniel's three friends had when they were confronted about their refusal to bow down before King Nebuchadnezzar's idol. They said, "If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king" (Daniel 3:17). They had faith—they knew their God and fully trusted in His power to save them!

*"If that is the case,
our God whom we
serve is able to
deliver us from the
burning fiery
furnace, and He
will deliver us from
your hand, O king"*

Now where does this faith come from? Romans 10:17 tells us that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." We must anchor our beliefs solidly on the

unchanging authoritative Word of God, the foundation and wellspring of truth (John 17:17). This is what will give us the same faith that the patriarch Abraham had. In Romans 4:20-21, we read that “he did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.” That is what conviction is—being fully convinced!

Do you recall what Joseph did and said when he was being seduced by Potiphar’s wife? What made him strong enough to resist? Conviction! In Genesis 39:7-9, we read: “And it came to pass after these things that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me.’ But he refused and said to his master’s wife, ‘Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’” There it is! Joseph called a spade a spade. He knew what was right and what was wrong! And he took action—he got out of there!

To deepen our conviction, we need to study and meditate on the words of God. Without conviction, we cannot move on and possess the second quality of a spiritual diamond.

Commitment is the degree to which one consistently acts on that knowledge and belief.

Here’s another way of understanding commitment—commitment is making a firm decision way in advance of the circumstance you will be faced with. It means binding yourself to a certain course of action, based on the truth of your conviction.

Let’s look at an example from the Bible of one who had commitment. Read Daniel 1:8: “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.”

He purposed in his heart—he made up his mind—he made a firm decision and bound himself to that certain course of action! That is commitment!



Do you remember the showdown of the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel? Elijah called for commitment! He said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21).

We need to take a stand and be decisive. But we cannot do that if we do not have sufficient conviction. And conviction comes from faith, and faith comes from hearing—and heeding—the Word of God! Unless we have this kind of conviction, we will be compromising left and right. But if we drink in and meditate on what God says in His Word, we will be able to say, along with Joshua: “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

Courage is the degree to which one is able to persevere in the face of trial or difficulty.

Unless we have conviction and commitment, we will not have courage—the strength and boldness to stand by our commitment no matter the cost. Why were Daniel’s three friends bold enough to risk death in a fiery furnace heated seven times? Conviction. Commitment. Courage. How about Joseph? For doing the right thing, he lost in one day his job, his freedom and his “good reputation.” He was willing to go to prison and to suffer ridicule and abuse because he was convicted, committed and courageous.

Look at all the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 beginning in verse 30. Why were they able to risk so much? Why were they able to face danger without flinching? Why did Daniel still pray even after knowing that the law was signed authorizing the death of all who prayed? Why did the apostles still preach Jesus as the Christ even after being arrested, beaten and thrown into prison? Conviction. Commitment. Courage.

Today, we easily become afraid at the thought of losing our recognition in school, the acceptance of our peers and perhaps our job security. We are not even threatened with death and torture like these heroes of faith were. Notice what was said of them in Hebrews 11:38: “Of whom the world was not worthy.” Why? Because they were spiritual diamonds. Only God knew their true worth.

Character is the degree to which one is conformed to the image of God’s perfect Son, Jesus Christ.

This is what God is forming in us all along. Picture these Four Cs as levels of a pyramid. The base is conviction, followed by commitment and courage. The capstone is character.

Character is the only thing we can take with us into eternity. Not our houses, our clothes, our appliances or our cars. And character is so precious because even God cannot create it by fiat! Just imagine several robots walking around following and obeying God saying, “Yes, Master!” just because they were programmed to do so. God is not interested in robots, but in children—in sons and daughters—who follow and obey God because they love Him!

No wonder God calls His people His jewels: “‘They shall be Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him’” (Malachi 3:17).



There is a Russian proverb that says, “A gem is not polished except by friction.” None of us enjoy the grinding and the heat and the pressure of the trials and difficulties of everyday life. But it’s precisely those very things—the heat, the pressure, the grinding, the cutting and the polishing—that transform ordinary carbon into a precious glittering diamond! The rest who despise the process remain the graphite to be made into cheap lead pencils.

We need to submit to God, the Master Craftsman, to develop in us the Four Cs of a spiritual diamond: conviction, commitment, courage and character. When the process is complete, we will be more brilliant than a diamond. As Daniel 12:3 states, our destiny is to be more brilliant than even the stars shining in the heavens forever and ever! One day we shall become spiritual diamonds—God’s most precious jewels! God can then exclaim: “This is my beloved son [or daughter], in whom I am well pleased!”

None of us enjoy the grinding and the heat and the pressure of the trials and difficulties of everyday life.

Let’s all strive to be spiritual diamonds of unshakable conviction, unwavering commitment, unflinching courage and Christlike character! For a diamond... is forever!

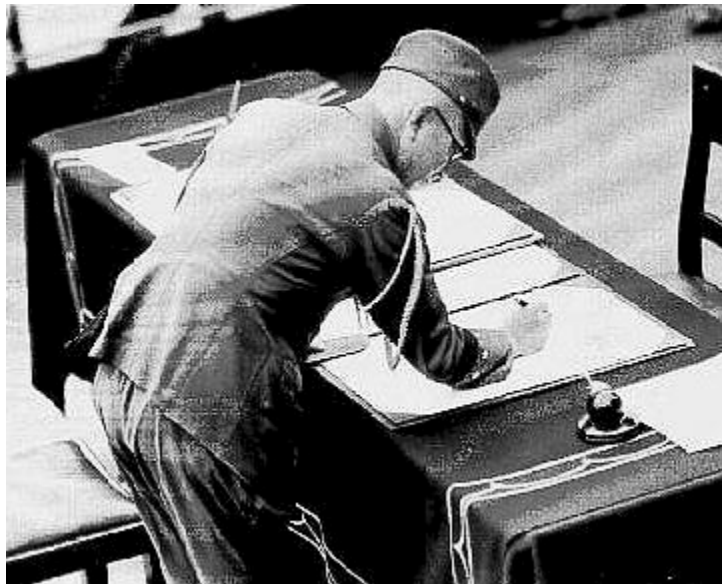
Recommended reading

What does God have in store for you, and how can you prepare for that future? Order or download a copy of [What Is Your Destiny?](#) to learn more about this fascinating subject.

Unconditional Surrender

By James D. Cannon

Nearly 60 years ago World War II ended with unconditional surrender. But unconditional surrender is not just for the history books, as it plays a vital part in our relationship with our Savior and conquering King.



ON MAY 7, 1945, IN REIMS, FRANCE (and a few hours later in Berlin), Admiral von Friedeburg, General Jodl, Field Marshall Keitel and General Stumpff, representatives of the German High Command, signed the instrument of unconditional surrender in the presence of the British, Soviet, French and American Allied Forces High Command.

Later that same year, on Sept. 2, 1945, on the deck of the USS *Missouri* before the Supreme Allied Command, on behalf of Emperor Hirohito of the Japanese Empire, Mamoru Shigemitsu attached his signature to the instrument of unconditional surrender. Yoshijiro Umezu, chief of the General Staff of the Imperial Japanese Army, subsequently countersigned it.



The Axis Powers and the Japanese Empire absolutely and unconditionally surrendered themselves and yielded themselves to the mercy and judgment of the Allied Forces who had conquered them.

It's not easy

Unconditional surrender is not an easy state of mind to bring into being. Someone must come to really see that he (or she) has been totally and absolutely conquered and that his only choices are unconditional surrender, imprisonment or death.

Members of the Body of Jesus Christ, or those who are in the process of coming to conversion and baptism, understand or are coming to understand that they have been conquered, bought and paid for, and have become a bond slave of Jesus Christ.

Of course, Jesus Christ is our Elder Brother, our High Priest, our Healer, our Chief Shepherd, our Friend, our Hiding Place and our Savior.

The Axis Powers and the Japanese Empire absolutely and unconditionally surrendered themselves.

However, Jesus Christ is also our Master, our Lord and the soon-coming King of Kings and Lord of Lords to whom we, at baptism, have unconditionally surrendered, placing our individual lives into His loving, capable and merciful hands. He has bought and paid for us—ransomed us from the death penalty that we have earned and deserve—by giving His very life through His sacrifice for all of mankind.

We have been defeated—God let Satan test us to see if we would sin, and we lost. We earned the penalty of death. When we realized that, we truly saw that we were conquered, but have we truly and unconditionally surrendered to God, Jesus Christ, God's government, God's laws and God's way of life?

This is a question we must be asking ourselves every day for as long as we live.

Our surrender

What is the ultimate purpose and result of our unconditional surrender?

God requires the unconditional surrender of those He calls. Remember, before our calling and repentance we were enemies of God and God's way of life (Romans 5:6-10). Bear in mind as well that our human nature is exactly opposite and opposed to God and His way (Romans 8:1-8). The Greek word translated "enmity" in verse 7 is *echthra*, and means hostility, opposition and hatred.

After God the Father calls a person out of this world, each individual must come to a point that he is willing to do anything and everything required by God in order to obey Him. When God the Father initially called us out of this world, we studied and prayed daily for forgiveness and asked God to grant us repentance and baptism. We counseled with God's ministers. We began the process of unconditional surrender to God and God's government as outlined in His Word—the Bible. We were then baptized.

We must now continue to live a life of unconditional surrender to God with the same zeal and commitment we had when God first called us. And, as we shall see, there is a very great reason and purpose that God is working out in each one of us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Also, God does not expect any more of us than He has expected from all of those He has called out of this world from the beginning.

Abraham proves his surrender

Let's first look at Abraham. When God called him out of his native land to move his entire estate to the foreign land of Canaan, he simply obeyed with no "yes, buts," "whys" or "do I have tos." Abraham simply obeyed (Genesis 12:1-9).

Later, when God tested Abraham, asking him to offer up his son Isaac—the one who had been miraculously conceived with his beloved wife Sarah—again Abraham obeyed (Genesis 22:1-19). Abraham obeyed because he was unconditionally surrendered to God. Of course, God spared the life of Isaac and provided a proper animal sacrifice for Abraham to offer. However, before God told Abraham not to slay Isaac, Isaac was as good as sacrificed in Abraham's mind.

Abraham also knew that God's promises were to be fulfilled through Isaac and his offspring, and that God would be able to resurrect Isaac in order to fulfill His promises. Abraham's mind's eye was focused on the future, the Kingdom of God, where the promises would ultimately be fulfilled (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego

Daniel's friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego are another example of individuals who were unconditionally surrendered to God. When King Nebuchadnezzar had a 90-foot-tall golden image erected in the middle of Babylon and required all to bow down and worship the image whenever they heard all the instruments play, they absolutely disobeyed. By rejecting the king's command, they incurred the death penalty in a fiery furnace.

When the political yes-men brought Daniel's friends before the king and accused them of not bowing down to the idol, the king was outraged. His veins began enlarging around his neck and his face began to turn red in anger. When the king asked Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego if the accusations were true, they answered the king in this way: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your



hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Daniel 3:16-18).

At that, the king became outraged beyond comprehension, his face now turned to a shade of purple and the veins on his neck and forehead bulged out. He commanded that the fiery furnace be heated seven times hotter than normal. The king then ordered some of his mightiest men to throw Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego into the fiery furnace. The furnace now was so hot that it killed these mighty men as they threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego into the furnace.

However, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego did not burn up at all. In fact, when the king was able to look into the furnace he saw four men, not three, with the fourth looking “like the Son of God” (Daniel 3:25).

The king then promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego to high governmental positions in Babylon and gave praise and honor, saying, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!” (Daniel 3:28).

Beyond showing their faith, obedience and giving the king a tremendous witness of God’s power, there was a much greater purpose and goal for Daniel’s three friends. Their hearts were firmly fixed on the Kingdom of God and their future positions as spirit beings, servant leaders in the Kingdom (Revelation 1:6).

The ultimate example

Finally, we have the example of our Savior and soon-coming King, Jesus Christ.

Just before His arrest, which led to His ultimate sacrifice for all of mankind, Jesus and His disciples went to the garden to pray. And Jesus Christ went off by Himself and prayed for guidance and for the strength He would need to go through the trial He would face during the remainder of His life on earth as a human being.

He asked God that if it were possible, if the Father were willing, that the trial He faced could be removed from Him. He prayed so fervently to God the Father that His sweat was as “great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44). Yet Jesus Christ prayed, “Not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:41-42).

Jesus Christ was unconditionally surrendered to God the Father and the Father’s will. Jesus Christ was not only surrendered, He was totally obedient to God the Father: “Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). Because of His commitment to being unconditionally surrendered to God, He has become our Savior, High Priest and the soon-coming King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Daniel’s friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego are another example of individuals who unconditionally surrendered to God.

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

A higher purpose

What then is the purpose for your and my unconditional surrender to God? Is it just so we will be good and obedient children while we are here as human beings? Or is our unconditional surrender for a much higher purpose?

After Jesus Christ was baptized, and following His battle with Satan the devil, the first thing He did was preach the good news of the Kingdom of God. He came saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

He explained to His disciples that after His sacrifice and death He was going to prepare a place, offices of servant leadership, for those who would be called to follow Him and His way of life. “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3).

Certainly Jesus Christ, our Savior, paid the penalty of death earned by every member of the human race since creation. And through this sacrifice, those God the Father calls and who then truly repent and are baptized are granted the free gift of unmerited pardon and eternal life.

However, the ultimate purpose—the end result of our unconditional surrender—is to attain the highest possible position God has set aside for us in the Kingdom of God as members of the family of God.

The apostle Paul fought hard battles daily, as we must, against the pulls of human nature, the temptations in the world and the darts of Satan the devil (Philippians 3:8-15). Paul further tells us to look to things on a much higher plane than what we currently see on earth. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2).

Let’s continue to strive daily to remain unconditionally surrendered to God and His way of life so we will receive the awesome potential God has set aside and prepared for you and for me in the Kingdom of God.

Recommended reading

Responding to God’s calling with unconditional surrender is important whether we are not yet baptized or have been baptized for years. Our booklet [*Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*](#) is full of helpful information about this lifelong process.

“Good Story!”

By Maarten de Jong

My boss asked me to teach history classes, and didn't mind if I taught them from a biblical perspective, even in secular Holland. But what would he think when he walked in while I was tracing the identity of the lost tribes of Israel?



“**M**R. DE JONG, HOW WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOUR GENERAL KNOWLEDGE?” This question came right out of the blue from my boss, Max Brokamp. Although only a couple of years older, and a good friend of mine, it is his custom to use the polite form (Mr.) at work, at least when others are around.

“Well, I dare to say better than average, but I'm not yet satisfied. There are lots of subjects I aspire to delve into further... but on the whole I think I can't really complain. But why this question?”

Mr. Brokamp started telling me about the extra course he was thinking about providing for some students who wanted to switch from under-bachelor to a bachelor's study, but who didn't have all of the proper background education.

Soon he gave me the responsibility for the contents of this “brush-up” course. In determining what the course should consist of, I had a lot of freedom. This was much to my liking—I could earn some money and, at the same time, brush up on some of the things I've wanted to know more about.

I aligned the outline of the course with the chronology of world history, dealing with subjects like philosophy, politics and religion. It was a challenge, yes, but one I was only too eager to dive into.

Mr. Brokamp himself is a religious man—which is a rarity in the Netherlands—and he knew I was too. What he didn't know, however, was that my beliefs differed significantly from his. Regardless, I showed him the outline and contents of my planned course, including the biblical aspects. With a smile he responded: “You are a lucky man, to have the chance to teach the better subjects.” I was aware that Max himself aspires to know and understand all things.

*I started explaining
the current
situation in our
world.*

Creation and evolution



In the first session, I spoke to the teenagers about the beginning of mankind, and the big dispute on the global level about which paradigm we should cling to: creation by a creator (religion) or creation by evolution (atheism). As objectively as I could, I explained both, providing the usual arguments for both sides. I did not neglect to mention the prevailing notion that “it is the conviction of philosophy that in our world of science, there is no place for incomprehensible gods.”

Then I started explaining how the earth came about by divine creation, and what has been discovered that validates the historical book called the Bible—how archaeology and other ancient writings help prove its authenticity.

Ancient promises fulfilled today

With the aid of the narratives recorded in Genesis, I started explaining the current situation in our world. Then I walked Mr. Brokamp (sometimes he would enter the room because of sheer interest). Right at that moment, I was aiming to prove the authenticity of the promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and how they have come about in our modern world. I explained how the tribes of Israel got lost, supporting my points with the aid of history books (for example, “In 722 B.C., the capital of Israel, Samaria, was taken captive by the Assyrians and the ten tribes were spread out”).

I asked the students the following questions: Why did the British Commonwealth get to be so mighty, and why has America become such a powerful nation? These are things most people don’t think of. They don’t realize they happened for a reason that is stated in Genesis.

Because of these fascinating stories, the class was locked on to me. Even Mr. Brokamp looked interested to hear this story from a whole different angle. He had never heard it this way before.



But how would Mr. Brokamp regard this all? When I walked by him in the corridor during the break, he gave me a quick smile and complimented me: “Good story.”

As I walked on, his words lingered in my head. “Good story.” Yes, it is a good story! But it’s more than that—it’s a true story and a very important part of history. It is His story—God’s story.

Maarten de Jong is a part-time teacher at a private college.

Recommended reading

For more about how the United States and Britain became so powerful in today’s world, and what it has to do with Genesis, read [The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy](#). Some other well-researched and beautifully illustrated brochures you may find of interest are [Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?](#) and [Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?](#)

Dating Disasters and Faulty Mate Selection: There Is a Better Way!

By Terry Hoffman

Never before have bookstore shelves been so well stocked with such a variety of self-help relationship books, yet there seems to be such a dearth of understanding of how to live peaceably with one another. However, the principles of the Bible can be used to identify resources that can help prepare for a successful courtship and marriage.



BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS AND DIVORCE are at an all-time high. Popular movies and television shows such as *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days* and *Friends* do little to help couples strengthen their interactions with one another or make solid, well-informed premarital decisions. It appears society has yet to understand the correlation between substandard dating tactics/attitudes and failed marriages and skyrocketing divorce rates. Sadly, even the traditional nuclear family (original father and mother rearing children under one roof) is rapidly disintegrating and is near extinction. Why?

Modern dating tactics and attitudes

In a children's survey, a 10-year-old boy named Martin was asked, "What do most people do on a date?" He replied, "On the first date, they just tell each other lies, and that usually gets them interested enough to go for a second date."

While humorous, this quote provides insight into the nonsensical dating approaches used today. The authors of *Boundaries in Dating: Making Dating Work* assert that truthfulness is an

essential boundary and need in dating relationships. “You should have an absolute zero-tolerance policy when it comes to deception... [and] lying should have no place in your life” as it is a serious character flaw and should be treated as a “deal-breaker” (Henry Cloud and John Townsend, 2000, pp. 45-46).

Regarding today’s prevailing dating attitudes, a 35-year-old woman recently observed, “Girls do not look at a guy closely when making the choice to date. They consider the guys’ looks, the car they drive, [and] if a girl doesn’t have a boyfriend... she feels insecure and unsafe... [displaying] her insecurity in a variety of ways, usually in the way [she] dresses. *Men will entertain a pretty girl, but he will be looking for that ‘special’ one who is perfectly not so perfect*” (T. Jaynes, emphasis added).

It is important to note that not all relationship books are created equal. *Guerrilla Dating Tactics*, for example, advises singles to learn tactics such as flirting maneuvers and pickup lines and to have a bag of tricks ready to use on that unsuspecting someone. The author talks about the importance of having (using) friends as a means of meeting “the one,” but doesn’t discuss the importance of developing a friendship with a potential mate (Sharyn Wolf, 1998, pp. 10, 68, 43-78). This book was written from the viewpoint of “what can I get” (self-gratification) from the other person, rather than “what can I give” to enrich another person’s life. In the Bible, wise King Solomon wrote, “A friend loves at all times” (Proverbs 17:17).

“Deepening intimacy without defining a level of commitment,” wrote Joshua Harris, “is plainly dangerous. It’s like going mountain climbing with a partner who isn’t sure that she wants the responsibility of holding your rope.”

As a refreshing contrast, there are several books that offer a more selfless and respectful approach to dating while strongly cautioning the reader to avoid the faulty reasoning and the problematic areas so prevalent today. As Joshua Harris correctly identified, “Dating is a product of our entertainment-driven, ‘disposable-everything’ American culture. Shifting attitudes in culture and the arrival of the automobile brought radical changes... and new “rules”... [allowing] people to indulge in all the thrills of romantic love without having any intention of marriage. Love and romance became things people could enjoy solely for their recreational value.”

He further pointed out that dating at the turn of the 20th century was very different. At that time families were very much a part of the whole courtship ritual, thus enabling a couple to steer clear of the hormonal pitfalls (*I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, 1997, p. 33).

Importance of premarital purity

Never before in American history have lifestyles and sexual attitudes changed at such a rapid rate. Thanks to the permissive era beginning with the 1960s, we now live in a sex-saturated society devoid of the deep love and commitment that once made marriages and families stronger and more stable. Gone are the social stigmas attached to living together before marriage or having multiple partners.

“We are in a kind of sexual wilderness, lacking right directions and guidelines... and people have tried to redefine the family in all kinds of ways” yet without success, as the bitter fruits clearly show (Noel Hornor, “God’s Purpose for Sex and Marriage,” *The Good News*, July-August 2002,

pp. 4-5). Solomon warned, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

Many use the excuse: "Everybody's doing it, and besides, how can it be so wrong if it feels so right?" Sounds plausible, right? But we need not look very far to see that sexual promiscuity comes with a very heavy price. According to a recent *Good News* magazine article, the physical/emotional results of "swimming downstream" speak for themselves: AIDS, genital herpes, chlamydia, venereal wart virus, cervical cancer, illegitimate children, abortion, sterility, not to mention the destruction of one's self-esteem, obliteration of trust and feelings of abandonment, guilt and rejection (Noel Hornor, "Sex Outside of Marriage: What's the Big Deal?," July-August 2002, pp. 10-13).

It is so important to take the time to get to know the opposite sex—how they think, operate and work to achieve their individual goals.

Sharyn Wolf even admits that *reality bites* when she cautions, "Beware of believing yourself to be safe because of serial monogamy, that is, sleeping with one person at a time in sequential relationships. You can end up with four or five serial monogamies per year, leaving yourself completely unprotected." While she admits that remaining celibate is the safest way to date, she does nothing to discourage couples from engaging in such premarital acts of fornication, in essence saying, "Let's see how far we can cross over the line without getting caught."

However, the Bible is very clear about this subject when it says, "For this is the will of God... that you should abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). In fact, many scriptures show that fornication is listed among many other destructive human behaviors (Galatians 5:19-21).



"Deepening intimacy without defining a level of commitment," wrote Joshua Harris, "is plainly dangerous. It's like going mountain climbing with a partner who isn't sure that she wants the responsibility of holding your rope." Premarital sex is like fraud, "ripping someone off by raising expectations but not delivering on the promise" (*I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, pp. 32, 34).

Psychologist Neil Clark Warren explains it this way:

"I believe in sexual abstinence prior to marriage. Sexual intercourse before marriage is a clear act of commitment! Once you have become sexually involved with a potential mate, your ability to think clearly and objectively becomes impossible. If we want to have strong families that emerge from wise selections... we need to overhaul our reasoning. If we continue telling single persons that sexual intimacy is healthy at whatever stage of their relationship, they will continue getting married for all the wrong reasons" (*Finding the Love of Your Life*, 1992, pp. 84-85).

According to noted, outspoken psychologist Dr. Laura Schlessinger, real courtship is gone. She poignantly remarks, "Hook-ups and shack-ups have no depth, no promise, no attachment, no contentment, no meaning" (*Ten Stupid Things Couples Do to Mess Up Their Relationships*, 2001, p. 5).

I think it is safe to say that the accepted input from society is not creating the kind of happiness and fulfillment couples are seeking—rather, it is creating an inability to maintain healthy attachments later on within marriage.

Asking the hard questions of yourself and a potential mate

As the book *Understanding Family Communication* (1998) points out, “The decision to marry is a prediction about how one person’s life with another person will evolve in the future based largely on how it has evolved in the past” (p. 89). This is why it is so important to clearly understand the dynamics that have evolved within one’s own family system and how those attitudes and ways of thinking will affect a future marital partner. The old adage, “The apple does not fall far from the tree,” certainly applies here.

Before we can understand and fulfill someone else’s needs, we must first have clearly defined who and what we are. “People are different from each other... in fundamental ways... [however], first it is necessary to study yourself. If you don’t have yourself accurately portrayed, no way can you portray anyone else accurately, [and] the best way to do this is to take a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) test” (David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates, *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types*, 1978, pp. 2-4).

Here the authors are referring to our ability to successfully connect, communicate and get along with others different from ourselves. As an aside, <http://www.keirsey.com> offers a similar shortened version of the MBTI, which can also give a helpful picture of our communicative style. Other helpful tests such as the DiSC, may be found via the Internet by going to <http://www.discprofile.com>. “DiSC (2003) provides a nonjudgmental language for exploring behavioral issues across 4 primary dimensions: dominance, influence, steadiness, and conscientiousness.”

As Neil Clark Warren noted, “Young people can’t select a marriage partner very effectively if they don’t know themselves well. Identity formation is incomplete until individuals have emotionally separated from their parents and discovered... their own uniqueness... and life goals” (pp. 12-13).



It is so important to take the time to get to know the opposite sex—how they think, operate and work to achieve their individual goals. Deborah Tannen explains, “Women tend to focus on intimacy while men’s primary focus is on independence.” These differences give “differing views of the same situation” (*You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, 1990, p. 26).

There are some very different basic needs that are mutually exclusive to men and women. With well over 30 years counseling experience, psychologist Willard F. Harley identified, in order of importance, the five most basic needs of a husband and wife. The husband needs sexual fulfillment, recreational companionship, attractive spouse, domestic support and admiration. The wife needs affection, conversation, honesty and openness, financial support and family commitment (*His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*, 1986, p. 10).

Wholesome relationships do not just happen. Informed choices based upon the Word of God are smart choices. “Real love,” wrote Gary Chapman, “is intentional... not obsessive.”

A breach of any one of these basic needs can spell trouble in marriage, so a wise couple should make every effort to please one another in these areas. Additional information about Dr. Harley's work may be found at <http://www.marriagebuilders.com>.

Another excellent tool that is an absolute must for couples is the Minnesota-based *Prepare/Enrich* program created by Dr. David H. Olson. Further details may be obtained at <http://www.prepare-enrich.com>. *Prepare*, for couples planning to marry, is a 165-question survey designed to ask the "hard questions" about the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship. Areas examined are marital expectations, personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, sexual expectations and child rearing, just to name a few. *Enrich* is designed to aid married couples with their specific needs.

Wholesome relationships do not just happen. Informed choices based upon the Word of God are smart choices. "Real love," wrote Gary Chapman, "is intentional... not obsessional" (*The Five Love Languages*, 1995, pp. 35-36).

Real love is a verb. It's not what we *get*, but what we *give*. The entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 enumerates our responsibilities as potential mates (as well as in every other relationship in life), and if followed, will create a solid future not only for our children but also for generations to come. We create our own reality—it is all about responsible choices and behaviors. After all, marriage *is* for grownups.

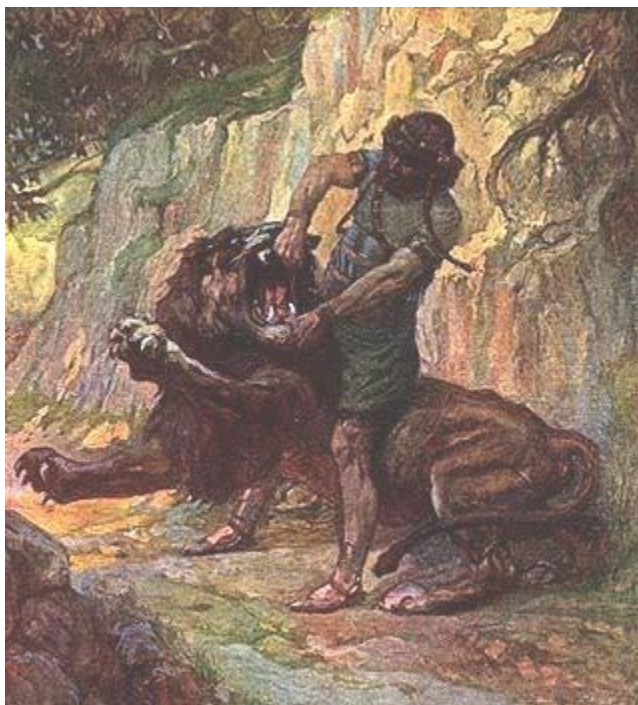
Recommended reading

To be truly happy in life—to make our lives work—we need to find and apply the principles that make our relationships work. The free brochure [*Making Life Work*](#) is a good starting place. Order or download a copy by clicking [here](#).

How Can We Be Stronger Than Samson?

By Jessica Curry

The story of Samson has much to teach us. The author, age 11, asks and answers important questions it seems Samson didn't fully comprehend till the end of his life.



SAMSON RIPPED OPEN A LION with his bare hands! Can you do that?

Samson slew 1,000 Philistine warriors with the jawbone of a donkey! Can you do that?



Samson hauled a heavy gate and two gateposts on his back up a hill! Can you do that?

If you're like me, you had to answer, "No, I can't do that." Maybe we can't do the feats of physical strength that Samson did. Yet we can be stronger than Samson. How? We'll find the answer to this riddle when we look at Samson's strengths and weaknesses.

What were Samson's strengths?

Samson was strong and agile. He caught 300 foxes and tied burning torches to their tails (Judges 15:4). I can't even outfox my dog, Twinkle Toes!

When tied up by enemies, he outdid Houdini by just ripping the ropes off instead of wriggling out of them (Judges 16:9).

When he owed clothes to 30 party companions after his wife leaked them the answer to his riddle, Samson “went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes of clothing to those who had explained the riddle” (Judges 14:19).

Was it Samson’s hair that made him strong? After all, it was after Delilah had a man cut off the seven locks of his head (Judges 16:19) that the Philistines were able to take him prisoner. Then it was after his hair grew back that Samson was able to pull down the pagan temple so that about 3,000 Philistines perished (Judges 16:30). No, Samson didn’t have superpower hair, so we don’t need to go looking for his hairdresser and special brand of shampoo! Cutting his hair broke his covenant with God, a Nazirite vow (Judges 13:5). It was God, not his hair, that made him strong.

Samson’s biggest strength was that he called upon God when he got into trouble. When he was thirsty—and it must have been a powerful thirst!—he “cried out to the LORD and said, ‘You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?’” (Judges 15:18).

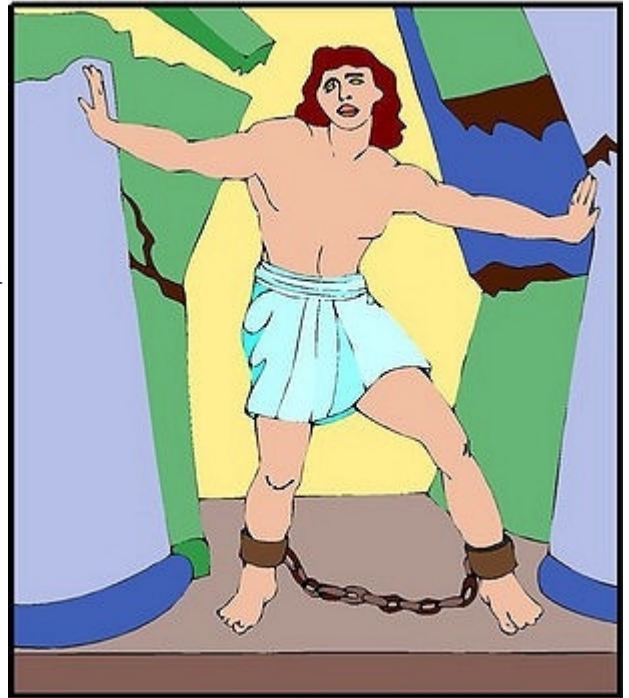
Samson knew he was God’s servant. Samson’s activities were “of the LORD—that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel” (Judges 14:4).

When Samson wanted to pull the temple down, he was willing to sacrifice his own life. Again he called out for God to help, “O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes” (Judges 16:28).

With these strengths—physically strong, agile, courageous and looking to God for help—Samson was a great “hero of faith” listed in Hebrews 11 (the faith chapter). Samson was truly one of those who “out of weakness were made strong” (verse 34).

What were Samson’s weaknesses?

Samson disobeyed his parents and ran after Philistine women (Judges 14:3). He met a girl in the Valley of Sorek named Delilah (Judges 16:4). Philistine men came up to Delilah one night and asked her to find out what made Samson so strong and they would each give her 1,100 pieces of silver. Delilah betrayed Samson. He should have been more careful in choosing his barber!



Samson hauled a heavy gate and two gateposts on his back up a hill! Can you do that?

Samson always wanted revenge on people. For example, after the Philistines burned his wife and her father, Samson said, "Since you would do a thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease" (Judges 15:6-7). But he didn't cease until after he took vengeance at the temple (Judges 16:28). This time, he first asked God before he took revenge.

The answer to our riddle!

So how can we be stronger than Samson? Samson was physically strong, and there's nothing wrong with that. Samson was strong because the Lord was with him so that he could defeat the Philistines. He was not strong enough by himself. He did those great feats of strength through God's help.

When he tore the lion apart, killed the 30 men of Ashkelon for their clothes and shed ropes like they were flax, the Bible says Samson was able to do it because "the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him" (Judges 14:6, 19, 15:14). But when it came to his weaknesses, Samson wasn't strong enough to control himself, and he didn't ask God for help.

When it came to his weaknesses, Samson wasn't strong enough to control himself, and he didn't ask God for help.

We can be stronger than Samson by:

- Obeying our parents. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).
- Looking to God, not revenge. "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).
- Watching whom we spend time with and whom we date.
- Keeping our commitment to God and not letting anybody tempt us.

Jessica Curry, age 11, is from Colorado.

Recommended reading

Young people are doing some amazing things! If you are a teen or young adult, you may be interested in our magazine for young people, [Vertical Thought](http://www.verticalthought.org). Check it out on the Web at www.verticalthought.org or order your own free subscription.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

“Even So, Come, Lord Jesus!”

By Mike Bennett

As we remember Christ’s first coming as Savior, we can look forward eagerly to His promised return as King of Kings!



TERROR OF ALL KINDS FILLS OUR WORLD TODAY. Suicide bombers, anthrax, radioactive “dirty” bombs, killer epidemics, kidnappings, gangs, rapes, murders, wars.

Everywhere we look, the trend is downward. Man’s inhumanity to fellow man is growing worse, and even the optimistic can find it harder to fight the feelings of foreboding that our world is on a course to self-destruction.

Jesus Christ looked down through history and predicted this spiral of sorrows leading to an unprecedented time of trouble before His return (Matthew 24:7-8, 21). Our spiritual Savior also promised to save humanity physically from total annihilation by His glorious coming (Matthew 24:22, 30).

As King of Kings, He will set up God’s wonderful, righteous Kingdom (Revelation 11:15).

This is the time God’s people through the ages have longed and prayed for: “Your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10).

John, an apostle of deep love and compassion, looked beyond all the troubles, plagues and war necessitated by man’s unrepentant evil, and saw the time when God will wipe away all tears, when there will be no more sorrow or crying (Revelation 21:4).



At the end of the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, three times John recorded Christ’s wonderful promise: “I am coming quickly” (Revelation 22:7, 12, 20). In response, John and all Christians reply with deep yearning: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (verse 20).

Recommended reading

For more information on these prophecies, request or download our free booklets, [You Can Understand Bible Prophecy](#) and [The Book of Revelation Unveiled](#). Also check out the brand-new booklet, [Jesus Christ: The Real Story](#). They are all free of charge.