

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."—Proverbs 1:7

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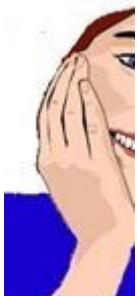


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Let's Keep on Going!

By Hector M. Earle

The adventures of the great Antarctic explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton carry meaning and inspiration for those on the Christian journey.



THE STORY OF SIR ERNEST SHACKLETON'S early 20th-century expeditions to the Antarctic have gone down in history as some of the greatest feats of adventure, endurance and determination that the world has ever known. Despite three grueling attempts to conquer that great frozen land, Shackleton never did reach his ultimate goal—to become the first person to set foot at the South Pole. Yet he never gave up and he kept on going.

His first expedition with the world-famous explorer Robert Scott was a disappointment, to say the least. They had not succeeded in getting anywhere near the pole. Instead they came close to losing their very lives. Shackleton himself became very ill and had to be sent back home long before the expedition ended.



His second attempt, on the ill-fated ship *Endurance*, was just one disaster after another. First, *Endurance* became frozen in pack ice and Shackleton and his crew had to spend a cold, dark winter in total isolation. Later that year, the ship was crushed and sunk by the tremendous pressure of the ice, resulting in the crew having to spend months on end in tents and makeshift shelters on top of moving ice floes at the mercy of the unforgiving elements.

When the ice finally broke up, the men made a treacherous and dangerous open boat journey to the rugged shores of Elephant Island. Then Shackleton and five other crew members set sail across 700 miles of one of the world's stormiest oceans and then made a dangerous overland trek across South Georgia island to get help at a whaling station.

Meanwhile, the crew left at Elephant Island had to suffer four months of unbelievable hardships until they were finally rescued by Shackleton himself.

His third expedition was an attempt to circumnavigate the entire continent of Antarctica on board the ship *Quest*. This, too, ended in failure as Shackleton died of a heart attack while his ship was taking on supplies at South Georgia.

Shackleton: success or failure?

When viewing Shackleton's adventures in tangible terms, one may come to the conclusion that he was a complete failure. He never achieved the goals he set out for himself. He lived not quite 48 years and died exhausted, dispirited and in debt. Yet he always followed his dream. "I shall go on going... till one day I shall not come back," he said near the end of his life.

Like many people whose accomplishments have won them lasting fame and admiration, Shackleton did not realize what he had accomplished. Today he is considered one of the greatest explorers of the 20th century. His name has become synonymous with bravery, grit and resiliency. Historians view Shackleton's success not so much in achieving his goals, but in the obstacles he overcame while trying to accomplish them. He truly was the epitome of courage, willpower and grace under pressure.

The magnitude of Shackleton's physical adventures parallels the Christian spiritual way of life. We, too, must have the willingness to endure and the resoluteness to battle against the obstacles of worldly influence. As we strap on our spiritual armor and prepare to battle against the world (Ephesians 6:10-18), we must, with God's help, fight against the evil forces that undermine our stand for all that is right, just and good.



Christian living has always presented a challenge for those who stand for the cause of Christ. Every day of our lives we are locked in a struggle against the forces of evil. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

High adventures, like those Sir Ernest Shackleton undertook, demand a willingness to undergo great hardships and discipline. Likewise, the Christian way of life demands resolve and determination to overcome all the fiery darts of the evil one in order that we may receive the crown of life.

Spiritual high adventures and hardships

Shackleton's incredible endurance and bravery pale in comparison with the spiritual high adventures and challenges of the early Christians whose resolve and commitment were second to none. In the book of Hebrews we get a glimpse of some of the hardships those great men and women of God were willing to endure for the cause of Christ. Some were made fun of and whipped. Others were put in chains and taken off to jail. They were stoned, sawed in two and killed by the sword. They went around in rags, poor, persecuted and mistreated (Hebrews 11:36-

39). What enabled these dear saints to endure such hardships? They knew they would be raised to a better life (Hebrews 11:35).



Other great men of God had to endure similar hardships as well. Such was the case with the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 he relates some of his experiences: “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.”

What did all these challenges do to Paul? Did they make him depressed, discouraged and defeated? By no means. As we see in other scriptures, this man strove to be a positive person and excelled in difficult times with a triumphant spirit. “For I consider,” he wrote, “that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

We, too, can strive toward that kind of faith that Paul and other saints had in their walk with Christ. For it was our Savior Himself who challenged us, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

We must view every step in our daily Christian walk as progress. Consider every bruise and scrape of life’s storms and trials a part of the price toward our ultimate goal—to become a child of God for all eternity.

No other adventure is more challenging than to “take up our cross” and follow Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. But in the end no other reward is greater than what awaits a child of God.

Meanwhile, let’s be encouraged by the inspired words of the apostle Peter when he wrote: “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (1 Peter 5:10).

Let’s keep on going!

The magnitude of Shackleton’s physical adventure parallels the Christian spiritual way of life.

Kissed by an Angel

By Robert Berendt

Could a chance encounter with a stranger be something more? Whether we're helping an angel or helping a fellow human being made in God's image, God wants us to be kind, merciful and loving—just as He is.



THERE ARE MANY TALES IN THE BIBLE about human encounters with angels. Some are frightening, some are delightful, and some are funny. Angels are God's messengers and workers.

Psalm 91:11-12 tells us that angels watch over and protect us. Daniel knew that angels shut the mouths of the lions that wanted to eat him (Daniel 6:22). In Acts 5:19 we read of angels rescuing some disciples from prison.

In Numbers 22:22 Balaam learned that an angel could appear to his donkey and yet be hidden from his eyes (this angel seems to have had a sense of humor). In Exodus 23:20-21 we read that God warned Israel not to provoke "the Angel" that He had assigned to lead them.

Angels serve God night and day and are often used by Him as He works with mankind. In the past, it seems, God used angels in a much more obvious way that He does today. Things are different since Jesus Christ rose and the New Covenant was ratified. Angels still exist and still work with and for God. But they do not always identify themselves as Gabriel did when he came to Daniel (Daniel 9:21-22).



God sometimes sends an angel to test a person's character. Hebrews 13:2 admonishes Christians in an unusual way: "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels." It seems angels can come in the form of a stranger—perhaps someone in need. Angels do not really need care, food or entertaining. Abraham eventually knew he was entertaining angels on the plains of Mamre (Genesis 18). But you might not know!

We are to recognize that all humans are children of God and have the potential to receive eternal life. We are not to shun strangers.

God wants to know that His children are capable of acts of kindness, mercy and love—just as He is. We need to emulate our heavenly Father.

In our society, however, wisdom is certainly essential when encountering strangers. Women and children should be especially careful and never get into a potentially dangerous situation by trusting strangers. I do not pick up hitchhikers—unless I see an obvious problem such as a person rolling a tire or carrying a gas can.

Running into Angel(a)

A few years ago, I was jogging alone through a little park on a rainy afternoon. Suddenly I heard a voice saying, "Sir, sir." An attractive young lady came running down a grassy knoll toward me. I looked around me— young ladies don't usually come running up to me—but I was alone, so I stopped. She came closer and asked me if I knew where the Alberta Hospital was in the city. I knew it was clear across Edmonton and hard to find. She said a patient who was a friend of hers was expecting her to visit at 6 p.m. and she was afraid of being late.

By now, I was thinking about the scripture that said we might be entertaining angels when we do something for a stranger.

I tried to describe the way, but realized it would not work. I offered to draw a map of the complicated route. I knew she would be late for sure.

Just then she said, "By the way, my name is Angel." Actually she said "Angela," but that was close enough. I was already recognizing unusual things here.

At this point, the storm was moving in and I said, "Tell you what—I'll quickly shower and change, and then I will drive to the hospital and you can follow me. That way you will be there on time." She was delighted, and so off I went to the gym (which was very near this park). Angel drove her Jeep after me. When I came rushing out in street clothes, Angel was nowhere to be seen and I thought, "Oh, well." I didn't recognize her, but she came right up and said, "Here I am." She had changed clothes from shorts and a jacket into a lovely dress and blouse, and had done her hair, and looked quite lovely. Something seemed terribly right—and yet curious—about the incident.

By now, I was thinking about the scripture that said we might be entertaining angels when we do something for a stranger. Things seemed unusual about this encounter. The storm grew fierce and rain poured down. Off we went as the storm clouds darkened. She stayed with me all the way into the hospital parking lot. It had taken 25 minutes and it was exactly 5:58 p.m. when we arrived. She would be on time. She was very grateful—she gave me a kiss on the cheek and was gone.



Was she or wasn't she?

I drove home slowly, musing about the scripture in the book of Hebrews. Was she or wasn't she? Did I or didn't I? Was I kissed by an angel or by an Angela? Even if she was "just" a young lady, nothing had been lost. I could feel good about helping another human being made in God's image. The point is that all humans are precious in God's sight. He'd like them all to have eternal life (1 Timothy 2:4). God is doing all that He can do, short of forcing us and making decisions for us. For that, we can all be thankful, and in that we can be confident.

Jesus Christ said that one of the clear identifying marks of His followers would be the fervent love they have for one another (John 13:34-35). He went on to teach that "he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

God sometimes sends an angel to test a person's character.

As a matter of fact, the last six of the great Ten Commandments are all about loving your neighbor as yourself. Thus, in children of God there will be an outgoing care towards other people. That care will emanate from the strength of obeying God's laws, which clearly define the path we ought to walk upon.

Taking wise risks

We should not be foolish and we should not be naive. God expects us to use wisdom in dealing with others. Specifically, the command to love is towards another converted person. But in John 3:16 we see that God loves the entire world. We are to grow in that direction. However, we ought to also recognize evil at the same time, and much is written about that in the Scriptures.

All humans are precious in God's sight. He'd like them all to have eternal life.

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus Christ instructed: "But I say to you, 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" (Matthew 5:44). We will sometimes be hurt when we try to help someone. We will sometimes be used and mistreated. But that ought to be expected from time to time. Jesus was not insulted or terribly distressed when all of His followers denied Him and ran away to hide. He even told Peter ahead of time that Peter, too, would deny Him (Matthew 26:69-75). We are to emulate Jesus Christ as best we can, and we are to grow in the ability to be like Him. So, though we are careful, we may be hurt.

Back to the story. This one had a happy ending: Angel vanished to visit her best friend, and I was left with a little "tingle" on my cheek and a little question in my mind. Was I kissed by an angel? I cannot be certain, but it's possible I was. How about you—have you seen any angels lately?

What Are They Thinking of Me?

By Becky Bennett

Making a good first impression is about more than your appearance—it's about giving!



HOME WAS 1,000 MILES AWAY! As were all my friends and most of my family. My sister picked me up from the airport and took me to my dormitory at the college I would be attending for the next nine months. The next few days were a flurry of new people. Three roommates. Nine other girls in my dorm, fellow students in the food line at the cafeteria. New teachers. Potential bosses as I interviewed for a part-time job. The number of new people—and the number of first impressions—was incredible. If you have been to college or made a big move, you know what I was experiencing.

But, even without going through a major move, most of us have opportunities to interact with new people—whether it is the clerk at the grocery store, a fellow patient at the dentist's office or a new person at church. Like me, have you ever wondered what kind of a first impression you leave?

Most of us think first impressions are all about how we look. Yes, appearances are important! But does that mean we're doomed unless we look like a movie star? Absolutely not! "Looking good" does not require being "good-looking." Looking good simply means you are clean and neat, have good hygiene, dress appropriately and appear comfortable with yourself.

Like me, have you ever wondered what kind of a first impression you leave?

The appearance of comfort or confidence is very important. If you try to mask or compensate for a perceived flaw—you slump because you think you are too tall, you do not smile because you are embarrassed by the gap in your front teeth—you make yourself less attractive. Relax about the details of your appearance. We usually imagine people notice a lot more than they do. When you "look good," your appearance recedes and people can focus on your personality instead.

Beyond looks

In analyzing social interactions psychologists have concluded that every interaction with another person has four effects: it affects how we feel about ourselves, how we feel about that person, how that person feels about us and how he or she feels about himself or herself.



“The secret to making a good impression, however, is to care about...how we make other people feel about themselves. Putting our own needs aside and focusing on making others feel good has a powerful influence on how they feel about us,” say Ann Demarais Ph.D. and Valerie White Ph.D., founders of a consulting firm called First Impressions, Inc. (“How to Make a Good Impression,” *Family Circle*, Sept. 7, 2004, page 46).

Socializing is an opportunity to give to someone else. According to Drs. Demarais and White’s book *First Impressions: What You Don’t Know About How Others See You*, there are “four universal social gifts” we can give in our interactions: appreciation, elevation, connection and enlightenment. These gifts are benefits in all types of situations—whether social or business.

Appreciation is simply showing an understanding and respect for others’ positive qualities. Elevation is improving others’ moods by smiling or being upbeat or humorous. Connection means finding common interests or similar experiences. Enlightenment is sharing interesting facts, ideas or trivia. All four gifts are important and needed. “A healthy balance of the four social gifts is charismatic,” say Drs. Demarais and White. “On the other hand, an imbalance can be off-putting.”

Showing appreciation

We give appreciation by showing genuine interest in others. This is probably the easiest way to make a good impression. “Just by being interested, you appear interesting,” say Drs. Demarais and White (page 59). Showing interest includes how you focus with your body and words, how you ask questions, listen and respond. Eye contact, for instance, “is a clear indication of interest, especially in American culture.” If you make less eye contact than others, “you may unknowingly send messages of lack of interest or attraction, or social discomfort” (page 61).

Putting our own needs aside and focusing on making others feel good has a powerful influence on how they feel about us.

Addressing a person by name is another way of showing interest. It “communicates that you paid enough attention to care, register and remember it...It may even be worth the effort to ask someone to repeat it or spell it” (pages 63-64). But be careful not to overdo it—saying a person’s name over and over can sound forced and artificial, as if you are trying to sell something.

Elevation

Since your first comments make more of an impact than what you later say, you are best to keep your comments on a positive note, at least to begin with. Check the impulse to complain or share a negative impression. (Save that for friends or family who have an interest.)

You can make others feel more upbeat and positive by being perky, smiling, using positive words and having positive emotion in your voice. Keep in mind if you fail to set a positive tone, you are actually setting a negative one. Smiling, showing energy in your body language and using upbeat and positive words brings out the best in your companion. He or she will feel liked by you and, in turn, is more likely to like you.

Making a connection

To connect with people it is best to start with the current situation that has brought you together. Whether we realize it or not, a common custom exists for meeting new people. We begin with the current environment or situation (weather, location, how you got there). Then, we can find out whether we have mutual friends or other connections. “Engaging in this ritual helps others to connect you to their world and to feel relaxed around you,” say Drs. Demarais and White (page 85).



You will be more successful in getting your conversational partner to open up if you remember to ask open-ended questions (not ones that can be answered with “yes” or “no”). Be attentive to his or her answers. Give compliments or show respect when the opportunity arises. When you are asked questions, be open and honest but be careful not to go on too long before you return the conversation to your partner.

Moving on to enlightenment

After the weather, we usually move on to facts, which are usually safe and at low risk for causing offense. What can you talk about? Consider things you have seen on TV, read or been told about. Even your own observations on everyday life can be useful. Some topics, however, are not ideal for a first conversation. Heavy topics—such as religion, politics and finances—require knowing someone better before they’re broached. On the other end of the spectrum, the commonplace details of life (traffic jams, the line at the post office, etc.) generally are not interesting enough to carry a conversation very far.

Be careful you do not impart all the “enlightening.” Ideally, the exchange should be balanced between both parties. However, some people like to speak more than 50 percent and others prefer to speak less. Try to get a feel for what your conversational partner’s preference is and speak a complementary amount.

Also, beware of the tendency to “talk at” someone instead of talking with him or her. “Talking at”—whether lecturing, telling long stories, sermonizing or telling lots of jokes—pushes your conversational partner into being an audience. Besides often being boring, it denies the opportunity to interact. “Talking with” shows an interest in the world and other people’s views.

Only after you have warmed up with pleasantries and facts, should you move into the high-risk (but also the more interesting) area of attitudes, ideas and opinions.

You will be more successful in getting your conversational partner to open up if you remember to ask open-ended questions.

The reward

I could have utilized some of these tips as I went off to college. However, I probably would have also asked, “What about me?” If I am always focused on giving a good conversation, when will my needs be fulfilled? Not to worry. “Paradoxically,” the authors say, “the shortest route to getting

what you want is to give to others first. The more you listen and connect, the more likely it is that others will return the attention” (page 25). Real, lasting friendships can be built from these initial encounters.

But, even if nothing further develops, you can have the comfort you are pursuing God’s GIVE way of life. Paul told Christians in his day, “Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). In fact, putting aside your own needs and striving to meet the needs of others is following the Golden Rule. “Therefore,” Christ told His disciples, “whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

Same-Sex Marriage Threatens Civilization

By Larry J. Walker

Many fail to realize the dangerous path that same-sex marriage is leading us down. Far more is involved than the opportunity for two members of the same sex to marry.



THE BATTLE OVER SAME-SEX MARRIAGE continues, though not always on the front pages. The PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) Web site cites a new survey indicating that 52 percent of Americans would favor a law that prohibits same-sex marriage. A recent *Washington Post* poll found that fewer than four in 10 Americans support same-sex civil unions that would provide some of the rights and legal protections of marriage. Legislatures in 38 states have adopted so-called Defense of Marriage Acts, which define marriage as a contract between a man and a woman.

Yet two Canadian provinces have now made same-sex marriages legal. And the highest court in Massachusetts ruled last November to allow same-sex marriages, which began May 17.

PBS commentator Jeff Sheler referred to these cases as “a changing of the guard, a social shift of historic proportions.” He commented, “The controversial change has sent shock waves through legal and religious communities on both sides of the border.”

Theological positions regarding marriage

Reactions to the issue of same-sex marriage serve as the latest barometer of whether the Bible is acknowledged and used as the basis of morality. (Marriage and family are still reeling from earlier attacks of permissiveness, adultery, premarital sex, disrespect, rampant divorce and remarriage, abuse and a host of other societal changes.)

In many cases today, human reason trumps Scripture’s fundamental teachings. Bible passages are either misinterpreted or discounted by those who advocate a personal agenda that conflicts with its plain teachings.

Liberal theologians conveniently dismiss the inerrant authority of the Scriptures and consider many historical events, including the creation account of Genesis 1, to be myths. Many of the plain statements by the apostle Paul are seen as temporary, cultural matters.

One church official, after writing off the clear teachings of Scripture as “cultural” and thus obsolete and irrelevant in our present-day civilization, concluded, “Keeping the faith is what counts.” But faith in what? Apparently faith in a stripped-down version of Scripture tailored to individual preferences and prejudices.

Reactions to the issue of same-sex marriage serve as a barometer of how or whether the Bible is acknowledged and used as a basis of morality.

Some claim that the human authors of the Bible were ignorant of the dynamics of homosexuality and the capacity for people to love someone of the same sex and to make a commitment of marriage. In their minds civil rights take precedence. Even some conservative Christians share that viewpoint, citing passages in Romans 13 that urge Christians to submit to civil authority.

Threats of homosexual issues to civilization

A homosexual man, who claims to be a devout Episcopalian, boldly stated in a PBS interview, “Family has been redefined. We no longer have, for various reasons, mother, father, two children. It can be now mother and two children; father, two children. It can be lesbians, one child, two children. It can be gay men.”

Herein lies the greatest concern. Same-sex marriage is not just about two people seeking permission and approval to make a legal commitment of marriage. It is about redefining longstanding, biblically based, fundamental aspects of our culture. It is the opening salvo on a moral battlefield with grave stakes for modern civilization, as we have known it.

Gay activists will not be content with the right to marry. They want equal rights and full acceptance of homosexuality as a legitimate “lifestyle.” This means that employers, including churches and schools, would be required to hire practicing homosexuals as teachers, pastors and in other occupations that influence the thoughts of others, including children.



Are you prepared for an even greater influx of love songs, television programs and movies based on homosexual couples? Even television commercials and other forms of advertising will pick up the trend. What effect will all of this have on your children and grandchildren?

We don't need to guess at the answers. It has already begun. One young Christian husband and wife were shocked when their young son brought home a book from his elementary school titled *The King and King*. The story centers on a young prince who tells his parents that he loves someone of his own sex. So their destiny as a royal couple is dubbed king and king instead of the traditional king and queen. The young couple expressed their dismay to school officials who defended the teacher's selection on the basis that other parents did not share their concerns.

This is one isolated incident, but one that will soon become commonplace if the present trend continues. Same-sex marriage is but a foot in the door to full recognition and legal approval of homosexuality in every aspect of life. Time appears to be in their favor. What is now the silent majority would become a silent minority, muzzled by “hate law” provisions geared to silence opposition. What is now the vocal minority would continue its campaign with the goal of becoming the majority and establishing homosexuality as the norm.

Think it can't happen? It already did—in Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible exhorts us, “And don't forget the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring towns, which were filled with sexual immorality and every kind of sexual perversion. Those cities were destroyed by fire and are a warning of the eternal fire that will punish all who are evil” (Jude 7, New Living Translation).

Importance of Christian reaction and response

The apostle Peter wrote that “God rescued Lot out of Sodom because he was a good man who was sick of all the immorality and wickedness around him” (2 Peter 2:7, NLT).

Although God refers to him as righteous, in the eyes of many Lot would be labeled as “homophobic.” This is another tactic to turn the tables on opponents of same-sex marriage and homosexuality. The prophet Isaiah decries this tactic, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20).

What about today? Is there enough commitment and determination by the majority of Christians and other citizens to resist the powerful efforts of the firmly entrenched gay activist minority? How deeply motivated are Christians to nip this in the bud? Jesus said in John 9:4, “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (New Revised Standard Version).

In some areas of Canada it is even against the law to quote the Bible's condemnation of homosexuality.



In the United States legislators in several states have sought to protect the legal status of marriage as a union between one man and one woman. In the recent election, voters in 11 states approved constitutional amendments limiting marriage to one man and one woman. The amendments won in Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Ohio, Utah and even Oregon—a state where gay-rights activists hoped to prevail.

President George W. Bush, too, has voiced support for a constitutional amendment that will limit marriage to heterosexual couples. The current version allows for civil unions for homosexual couples, giving the amendment opponents on both sides of the issue. Many traditional-marriage advocates consider this as an unacceptable compromise, and many homosexuals view it as unjustly discriminatory. However, even this weakened version has been given slim chances for congressional approval.

In 1 Timothy 2:2 Paul exhorts us to pray “for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” The Louw-Nida lexicon offers, “that we may live in entire godliness and propriety,” and adds the comment, “In some languages ‘propriety’ is best expressed as ‘to act in the right way’ or ‘to act as one ought.’”

Civil rights vs. legal responsibilities

Viewpoints on same-sex marriage reflect a growing trend of emphasizing rights over responsibility. One young homosexual in Portland, Oregon, protested in a television interview, “This is the 21st century; we should be able to do whatever we want to do.” This mindset is a recipe for anarchy, not freedom.

Some seem to forget that citizenship is not just about one’s own personal freedoms. It also includes the rights and freedoms of others. The laws of the Bible define true freedom and form the basis of the civil governments of the United States and other Western nations.

In the United States, the concept of “civil rights” seems to be elevated above the rights of governments to establish and enforce laws that define and safeguard the freedoms of everyone. The Bible presents the law of God as “the perfect law of liberty,” or as the New International Version translates it, “the perfect law that gives freedom” (James 1:25).

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Redefining and rejecting the laws of God puts us on a course that threatens the freedoms that we presently enjoy and take for granted. Tampering with the longstanding definition of marriage, sometimes called a divine institution, as the union of one man and one woman, described in the opening chapters of Genesis, threatens the very building blocks of society—marriage and family.

God told the first man and woman to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). He designed the two sexes for that purpose. Two men or two women cannot produce children as biological parents. Marriage and family are also fundamental to the plan of God in the spiritual lessons that He wants us to learn from these relationships as He designed them.

Future of marriage and family

Jesus emphasized that “from the beginning of the creation God made [us] male and female” (Mark 10:6). That same Jesus promises to restore all things in His coming Kingdom (Acts 3:20-21). That will certainly include restoring the appropriate marriage and family relationships that are clearly spelled out in the Bible.

In the meantime mankind has some bitter lessons to learn from disregarding and defying these most fundamental truths of the Bible that form the moral basis of civilization.

Christian Hope and Help for Homosexuals

Often people have been raised in a dysfunctional home environment they could not control, which left them susceptible to sexual sins. In light of this, God’s ministers compassionately help Christians who wish to conquer wrong sexual inclinations of whatever nature. The United Church of God provides a compassionate ministry to help educate, comfort and assist Christian men and women in surmounting this challenging personal issue. We offer a publication titled *Anchor*, a magazine of hope for Christians struggling with homosexuality. More information about *Anchor* can be found at its Web site, www.anchorhelp.com.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

Confusion Over Noah

By Lorelei Nettles

Was the story of Noah based on other mythical stories, or were these stories actually a retelling of a real historic event?



RECENTLY I WATCHED A TELEVISION PROGRAM titled *The Mysteries of Noah’s Flood*, on The Learning Channel. I excitedly looked forward to viewing it since I usually enjoy their programs. But this time was different. This time they let me down with their conclusions.

The show was centered on if, where and how the story of Noah evolved and if it was even true. Throughout the program, they spoke with those who are sure of the ark's reality. They also, of course, spoke with those who were sure it was no more than a tall tale.

At one point, the discussion turned to various tablets uncovered in different areas of Mesopotamia. The tablets tell the story of a man who built an ark, collected animals before a flood that took the lives of the world and also released birds. One story claimed the flood came because the people had gotten too noisy.

The tablets found were scientifically dated and the results proved the tablets were written long before the biblical account. They concluded that either the biblical account of Noah was created from the hearing of these stories while the Israelites passed through these areas and mingled with the local people, or the story was learned by Israelite leaders and used to keep the people in fear of their God.

In their view, no flood occurred. The program's speakers repeatedly referred to Noah and the ark as a myth. They stated no scientific proof exists that a flood of this magnitude ever occurred and that any major flood would have seemed an act of God to the people of that time.

What bothered me the most was the perception they left with the viewers—that they had proven (though this was never directly stated) that there was no way the Bible's story of Noah could be true. They based all this on the finding of those tablets.

I waited and waited for them to mention the third possibility they should have recognized: *The Flood stories found written on tablets were, in fact, based on the same story of Noah.* Yes, the names may have been changed and, yes, the tablets may have been older than the biblical writing, but any child who has played the game of "telephone" can tell you how different versions of the same story can arise.

Too often in this world people fall away from faith and require undeniable physical evidence of a thing to believe in it. Without such proof, they seek to undermine the facts in any way they can. Anything they find that would back up the truth, they will turn around and use to discredit the facts instead.

Two scripture passages came to mind after watching the program. The first is Proverbs 3:5-6. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." The word "direct" in Hebrew is *yashar*, which means "to make smooth, straight, or *right*." In other words, we should rely upon God to guide us in the right direction, instead of relying on our own human understanding.

The other passage is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." In order for the educated people on this program to believe the "myth" of Noah and the ark, they would have to admit so many other truths from God's Word. They were not prepared to do this.

We must learn to have faith in what God has done and will do in the lives of mankind. God provided us His Word to base our lives on. He produces miracles, and we must believe in those miracles. He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

It never occurred to those *educated people* that the Flood story was told and retold throughout the generations following the Flood. Those who were not followers of God would, of course, enhance it as time went on. Their agendas or memories were changing and they would have easily changed the minor details to suit their needs. To me it was so obvious! Of course, the stories found written on the tablets and in the Bible are close in detail—**they are indeed the same story, the historic accounts of Noah and the ark.**

Recommended Reading

For more information on the subject of Noah, read the following *Good News* articles: [“Noah’s Flood: Did It Really Happen?”](#), [“Serious Problems With Dating Methods”](#) and [“Did the Noachian Flood Cause Global Catastrophe?”](#).

Since the time of Noah has many parallels to the end time, you may also be interested in reading our free booklet [Are We Living in the Time of the End?](#)

Letters to the Editor

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Can Science Give Us Eternal Life?



The article in your November 2004 issue of *Virtual Christian Magazine*, [“Can Science Give Us Eternal Life?”](#) by Larry Walker, was fabulous. I hope to see it in *The Good News* or *United News*. That way everyone can benefit.

His points were excellent and I can’t imagine a worse punishment than having to live forever in the physical flesh in Satan’s world. Plus the chaos it would bring economically. At some point people would be forbidden from having children, thus depriving precious potential sons of God

from life, all for the vainglory of living to be, say, 400 years old. Let's have some commonsense here and trust that God's fourscore and ten is the way to go!

— Marilyn Braley

We're glad you liked the article! Actually it was originally published in The Good News in July/August 2000 Good News. To look at other articles from past issues, visit <http://www.gnmagazine.org/issues/index.htm>.

"What Is the Gospel Jesus Christ Taught?"



I want to commend you for what you people have been doing. I know it's of God. I was really blessed by the magazines I received from my friend. The article on the [gospel of the kingdom](#) really touched my heart. I pray that God will continue to bless you and strengthen you the more.

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity