

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye."—Psalm 32:8

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Building a Solid Foundation—Part 1

By Jean Jantzen

As with any relationship, the place to begin in rearing children is to lay a good, strong foundation. Part 1 of this 3-part series deals with the fundamental key of teaching the three R's—respect, responsibility and restraint—from an early age.



“**W**HERE THERE IS NO LAW, but every man does what is right in his own eyes, there is the least of real liberty”—Henry M. Robert.

It seems everywhere we go these days, we see young children demanding toys in toyshops, candy in grocery stores, fighting on playgrounds or misbehaving in restaurants. “One mom, grocery shopping with a child in the cart and a boy by her side, was forced to abandon her shopping and the store,” says an older male shopper shaking his head sadly. “The 3 1/2-year-old demanded candy from the bulk bins, taking one. The mother told him he couldn’t, so he threw himself on the floor yelling and screaming. Not all children are this unruly,” the man laments, “but I see this type of behavior often in the many stores I shop at.”

Where to turn for child-rearing advice?

As a mother of seven and grandmother of 27, I look back with mixed feelings to the birth of my first child, at a time when I, too, had no idea how to train or teach him. I only knew I wanted to be a more involved parent than my own parents had been. However, the role models I had at the time were hardly satisfactory. I knew one young couple that was not only incompetent, but also abusive. The father would flick his finger hard on the baby’s tiny foot every time she cried, and later, I saw the mother hit her toddler with a hairbrush if she didn’t obey.

Another, an aunt of mine, was so concerned for her baby that she was always washing his bottles, spoons, dishes and clothing. If the boy got one speck of dirt, she was washing him up. I didn't know who to ask for advice. I looked into the innocent face of my firstborn and hoped I would not let him down.



But should such an important job be left to chance? Many new mothers and fathers haven't the faintest idea how they intend to raise or discipline their offspring. Some seem not to have given it much thought. Most educational curricula do not include courses to teach prospective parents how to rear children, and many young people reject the example of their own parents' child-rearing practices. This is because they consider their methods too old-fashioned, they were not good role models, or simply see it as a way of asserting their own independence. Child rearing has gotten so out of hand television shows are trying to deal with the phenomena—e.g. *Super Nanny*, *Dr. Phil* and even *Oprah*.

"I hope to learn from my parents' mistakes," says Lindsay Davis, a 22-year-old single woman from Port Alberni, British Columbia. Exactly what that would entail, however, she is not sure.

Those who reject their parents' advice could turn to aunts and uncles or grandparents. But do we want to listen? Or would we rather listen to psychologists, doctors or others who seem to have all the answers in the endless books and guidelines on the subject of child rearing? Neil Postman, chair of the Department of Culture and Communications at New York University, writes in *The Disappearance of Childhood*, "Many parents have lost confidence in their ability to raise children because they believe that information and instincts they have about child-rearing are unreliable...thus, psychologists, social workers, guidance counselors, teachers and others representing an institutional point of view invade large areas of parental authority, mostly by invitation...resulting in a loss of the intimacy, dependence and loyalty that traditionally characterize the parent-child relationship."

Not everyone feels that way, however. Anna Lewis, a young woman in her early 20s, says she would raise her children similarly to how she was raised. "I respect my parents, I love what they are and what they stand for. They are ethical, honest, loving people and very strict Germans."

But, besides asking those we love and trust, is there a dependable authority on the single most important task we will undertake?

God gave us a manual—the Bible—so we can learn how best to function, to be harmonious and happy. Some find the advice in Proverbs particularly helpful: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). In other words, there are right and wrong ways to rear our children.

As with any relationship, the place to begin in rearing children is to lay a good, solid foundation based upon God's Word. Remember the parable of building one's house upon the sand? When the rains came, the house fell down. Over the years, I've discovered five key ways to build a secure foundation: (1) by taking charge of the very young child, (2) by using the family meal to teach important lessons, (3) by allowing constructive play time, (4) by curbing the use of television and (5) by making the most of the wisdom and support of the extended family or a supportive network of older friends.

The three R's—respect, responsibility and restraint

In this first installment, I'd like to focus on the initial key—taking charge of the very young child. When I attended school in the 1940s, the three R's—reading, writing and arithmetic—were our main concern. Similarly, the more abstract three R's of respect, responsibility and restraint should be taught early, or children and parents may suffer the consequences for years to come. If well-meaning parents try to satisfy their children's every whim and want instead of laying a firm foundation of solid, basic values, they, too, will find themselves floundering in heaving sand.

Laying a good foundation means being firm and consistent from the beginning. A structured environment is needed where the parents, and not the young child, are in control. Much grief may be spared if we listen to these wise words of Solomon: "Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death" (Proverbs 19:18, New International Version). This firm, consistent approach is more likely to establish acceptable behaviors than haphazard physical punishment done in anger or frustration. And if firm, fair rules—such as regular bedtimes, saying please and thank you, sharing toys and listening the first time—are in place from the start, as the child grows in responsibility and self-restraint, punishments or restrictions will be less necessary. A noted child psychologist, Erik Erikson, states that the "reliability of parents to be consistent breeds trust." Limits assure children of a parental safety net.

Having seven children, I found that each reacted differently to the household rules. Some responded readily, while others were stubborn and headstrong, and some just could not resist negative influences, which counteracted my best-intentioned child-rearing efforts. In one instance, I remember asking myself as a parent why, when I had exerted much effort to teach the rules of "respect for others" to my children, some still did not always talk or act appropriately. As a little child I never talked rudely to my parents. But why not? My mother and father never actively taught these principles. There are genetic differences in temperaments, but I knew there had to be an even more important factor.

I came to the conclusion that, in those days—the 1940s and '50s—common courtesy and respectful behavior were expected of children toward parents, teachers and other adults, so that is how most of us behaved—at least, when adults were around. There was no television, or other types of media influence, to teach or show my playmates or me otherwise. Our world was small and uncomplicated, and I did not learn to be sassy or ill-mannered because I did not come in contact with that. These thoughts confirmed my notion that little boys and girls are sponges waiting to absorb what they come in contact with. A child learns habits—be they good or bad—from somewhere or someone.

Nationally syndicated columnist and author, William Murchison, points out in *Reclaiming Morality in America* that respect and restraint play a large role in our lives, but somehow, because of fear or ignorance, teaching these values to our children has fallen by the wayside. "Animals do their own thing, and why not? Being an animal is no big deal. A dog can do it—a pig, an ape. The human destiny, which partakes of the divine—at least our civilization used to believe it did—is higher by far. The journey is infinitely more demanding. The decline of religion in modern times—say, the last 200 years—blurs the human-animal distinction. Respect and restraint? What for? Where's the fun in all that?"

Start early by providing structure

So, how are we to ensure our children learn respect, responsibility and restraint in a world that has changed so radically in the past 50 years? By starting to inculcate these principles when the child is a few months old, as well as helping the child to avoid bad influences.

The 3-, 6- or 9-month-old cannot set limits for himself or herself. It is the parent's responsibility to make the decisions when the baby needs to be breastfed, given a bottle, solid food, a diaper change or a nap. If you continually feed your baby thinking his cry always indicates hunger you will overfeed and create an uncomfortable and even more upset baby. But he will also learn that his cries get a certain response from his mother that may not be healthy for the child (a child cannot get too much loving affection!). The child, or the situation, is then out of control with the mother no longer gently molding the baby's attitudes and expectations. So, most important is "what" the baby learns from "how" you fulfill his needs. If managed appropriately, patterns of cooperative behavior will begin to emerge.

One 10-month-old did not like solid food, so he was given a bottle, which he drank whenever and wherever he wanted, day or night. If he could not find it, or it ran out of milk, he cried. This pattern of behavior could eventually have caused him to become malnourished or led to an eating disorder. And, it might have led him to believe that whatever he wanted should be readily available whenever he wanted it. This is not how life works and this is not the message we should want him to learn.

Change is possible, however, if started early. For instance, my aunt called to say she was ill and asked if I would care for her 8-month-old daughter. By then I was pregnant with my fourth. Her baby was a fussy child, crying and demanding much of her mother's time and attention. I believe this was because her mother had not set a regular naptime; thus, many times, the baby was simply overtired and cranky. Having a busy household, I needed to provide my niece a well-structured play, sleep, eat and bath-time environment, the same as my own children. Within a week she had begun to respond by happily eating her meals and going for afternoon naps and bedtime without too much problem. She also played more contentedly.

Naptime offers a welcome opportunity to instill habits of self-control and obedience, not only for now, but for the future. For example, a child can be trained to sleep on a foam mat beside you on the floor. If he fusses or tries to get up, pat him on the back, but don't allow him to rise or wander away. Two or three sessions should establish the desired behavior and twice during the week should keep the habit solid. Then naptime at home, church or while visiting others will not be such a frustrating experience for the parent—or the overtired child.

So, does exercising all of this parental authority mean we do not love our child? Of course not! We all know a small baby needs much care, love and protection—but structure? Don't worry during the first weeks of your baby's life—relax and enjoy. But as the weeks turn into months, you must take charge.

Setting consistent expectations

So, what expectations do you have of your newly begotten child, or yourself? Having a carefully thought-out plan is helpful. What is important to you? What are important things for your baby to learn? Do you want him to go to bed without complaint and at a set time? Do you want your child

to sit in a highchair without screaming or throwing food all over the floor? Do you want him to have an afternoon nap on a mat on the floor beside you? Are certain cupboards off-limits, or are there ornamental objects you do not want your child to touch? Should he be expected to pick up his toys? Should she listen to your instructions?

Early training, shaping and molding in these all-important behaviors helps develop long-lasting habits of respect toward others, and their possessions, and responsibility and restraint in dealing with their own emotions. (A child's responsiveness and temperament, of course, determines how difficult this training will be.)

Some parents act as if they believe a child in the 1- to 5-year-old category is a different breed than those aged 6 to 10. They allow the younger ones to indulge in silly, rude and obnoxious behavior such as making faces or sticking out their tongue, stubbornly saying no or making smart-aleck remarks just because they are little. For example, when asked by a parent or adult "Are you going out to play?" they respond with "What do you think?" or "So what?"

To ward off this type of behavior, the teaching of the toddler should be the same as for an older child of, say, 3 or 4. Their abilities may differ, but our expectations for their behavior can be similar. An unacceptable behavior should be unacceptable no matter what the age of the child. Bad habits can attach themselves like super glue. It's confusing when, at 7 or 8, he wonders why mom, dad and others no longer find his behavior amusing. Bad behavior also should not automatically be excused because the child is tired, hungry or "not himself." This only teaches the child to use his feelings as an excuse for inappropriate behavior.

A preschool teacher, supervisor, group leader and group daycare owner for over 40 years, Ruth Weber agrees that good behavior should be expected from an early age. Ruth provides a structured environment for six children from 2 to 6 years old. Two bright, sunny rooms (one for structured play, the other with desks and chairs for educational activities) are readied each morning for the children who, under Ruth's care, are all given responsibilities.

During my visit, the littlest girl, 2 1/2, is told to pass out some crayons to the group, which she does, eagerly, quietly and efficiently. Older children who pet her and praise her are abruptly halted by Ruth who quietly explains that the girl is part of the group, has a responsibility to the group and is not to be treated differently than anyone else. She stresses that they should talk to her as another child—merely saying, "thank you," etc.—and not as a baby. Following this principle of having the same rules of conduct for younger and older children prepares 2- or 3-year-olds for heavier expectations to come. The children told me they love going to Ruth's home.

Appropriate discipline

Inevitably, there will be misbehavior or wrong attitudes that will need to be dealt with. Most psychology books argue that children should never be disciplined by spanking, but by reasoning. I believe spanking (which is totally different from beating, which would be child abuse) does have its place in training when done in love and as a teaching tool.

What of temper tantrums, for instance? Or demanding something off the shelf of the supermarket? Proverbs tell us, "A youngster's heart is filled with foolishness, but discipline will drive it away" (22:15, New Living Translation).



Once, my 3-year-old fell to the floor in a temper; another time, my 30-pound 20-month-old, who was in my arms, angrily threw himself back and could have got seriously injured had I dropped him. I spanked with one or two firm slaps on the bare thigh. (Swatting through thick diapers and clothing is ineffective and the child thinks you are playing games.)

Consistent responses to inappropriate behavior quickly teach the child you mean what you say. One piece of advice though: If you do not have the time, energy or are too distracted to back up what you say with instruction or discipline, don't say anything. Also, discipline must fit the action. If a child spills his drink accidentally, he should help clean it up. If he interrupts, explain why he should not do so. However, there are instances when talk is not enough.

While some children listen to a firm no, others will persist. My 20-month-old grandchild, when told to quit pulling his brother's hair, stuck out his tongue and spit at his mother. He was given one or two firm slaps to reinforce that he should not repeat this behavior. Solomon tells us plainly, "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong" (Ecclesiastes 8:11, NIV). This proverb applies to child rearing as well.

Be careful, however, that you do not begin physical discipline too early or administer it for wrong reasons. For example, 6-week-old Julia sobbed for a long time after a spanking she received from her well-meaning parents. The baby had begun crying because of too much handling from friends and relatives. The new parents judged her crying was not a need to be fulfilled, but signs of a temper that should be corrected. Flustered by our own lack of knowledge, it is easy to make mistakes. We need to learn to distinguish a baby's different cries before we hastily set a course of action.

Teaching respect

Many psychologists say that a child's respect must be earned; that our own behavior should meet certain standards. It is true that the responsibility for being a good role model begins with the parent. Showing children respect shows them how we should behave toward others, no matter what age.

What happens, however, when a parent, teacher or other authority figure does not, on occasion, measure up to our child's expectations? Does that justify or give the child a reason to be disrespectful? Certainly not! Children should be taught to respect the status of mom, dad, elder or teacher, regardless, and to honor elderly wisdom. As the Bible says, "The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness" (Proverbs 16:31).

Children allowed to be insolent will learn wrong problem-solving behaviors. Instead, they should be taught to talk out a difficulty courteously and with consideration.

Parents and child alike will enjoy the fruit of the parent taking charge in these early years. Children thrive where there is an abundance of love accompanied by a regular routine and limits,

reasonable expectations and appropriate correction. Learning respect, responsibility and restraint will be beneficial for life.

Recommended reading

Next issue our series on child rearing will show how family meal time and constructive play can help build a solid foundation.

For more biblically-based information on building a strong marriage and family, be sure to read our free booklet [Making Life Work](#).

Planning for Life—Two Crucial Keys

By Ken Treybig

What steps can you take to make your life a success? How should you begin?



ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS people—especially young people—need to do is develop a career plan. You shouldn't rely on others to do your planning. In fact, when others chart your course (such as when parents decide a career for a child), those plans often don't fit the circumstances. The person whose life is being micromanaged can end up feeling trapped and unhappy.

The best path is for *you* to take the time to take stock of your own assets, then create your plans for a career based on godly spiritual principles—including due consideration of how your life's work can benefit the world in the age to come after Jesus Christ returns.

Here are two principles to help you along your journey: building a network of support, and not automatically accepting limitations others may place on you.

The value of support

First, let's consider the advice of Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 as it relates to your plan for life. The New Revised Standard Bible translates King Solomon's words this way: "Two are better than one,

because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.”

Life is a journey, not a destination. Any long trip holds the potential for surprises, snags, delays and other challenges. So it is with life in general.



Even when we follow an overall strategy as we should, things don't always go our way. The variables are almost endless. They might involve health—your own or that of a family member. They could include finances or involve conflicts with scheduling or problems with a class if your plan includes college or trade school. They might even be psychological, prompting you to lose your focus and slip into a counterproductive frame of mind.

Regardless of the nature of the challenges we face, they can inspire us to build a support network to provide the kind of help the Bible describes—friends to lift you up, sometimes literally but most often figuratively.

The same passage in Ecclesiastes 4 notes that a rope of three strands is strong and not quickly snapped (verse 12), reminding us of the benefits of more than one person cooperating to help us along our path.

Networking: Ancient principle, modern adaptation

In books and articles about business matters, much has been written about *networking*, the technique of making connections, acquaintances and friendships with many people. This practice is a modern adaptation of a timeless biblical principle recorded thousands of years ago.

Someone who is a friend indeed will support and help you through your problems, even when they may be self-inflicted, such as those stemming from losing sight of your career goal. At those times you need someone who cares enough about you to tell you the truth.

Truth may not be what you want to hear at the time and may in fact hurt, but a friend who tells you the truth—so that you can return to the right path—is the best kind to have. Proverbs 27:6 tells us that the “wounds”—the painful corrections—coming from true friendship are “faithful.” Such a friend has our best interests at heart. That’s the kind of friend who can stick closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24).

So choose your support network well. It’s good to have many friends, advisers and even mentors. However, it is probably *most* helpful when these people have the same spiritual values you have. They can likely give you the best guidance along your career path.

Networking, building a support group, is just as important when you’re *beginning* the process of developing your plan for life as it is later on when you are implementing your plan. As you develop your life plan and goals, discuss them with others who know you well. Parents, counselors, pastors and other advisers can be a great source of help as you begin the walk down the path you’ve chosen.

Proverbs 15:22 shows the importance of asking for help with your approach, since without counsel “plans go awry.” If you avail yourself of the help of others, do not make the mistake of leaving them out of the loop. Keep them informed of your progress. They will be grateful for your continued contact, and you will gain the benefit of their support and encouragement as you make your way step by step.



Never give up

If you're like most young people, you'll probably get more advice than you want—and often from sources you haven't pursued. While such advice can be helpful, don't always assume everyone who gives you advice should be part of your permanent support network. If you received sound advice when you originally chose your career, don't casually cast it aside and change it. Just because someone questions whether you can persevere in a certain direction, or predicts you will never achieve your goals, don't quickly abandon your plan and become sidetracked.

Naoko Takahashi ran track at a junior high school in Japan. She loved to run, but she wasn't winning any big races at the junior high level. Still, running was one of her goals, and she worked hard at it.

Naoko didn't stand out in senior high school or college, either. After college she wanted to join her employer's running team, but company officials told her she wasn't good enough for the company to pay her way to its running camp.

Naoko was determined to continue to pursue her passion for running, so she paid her own way to the camp and continued her quest to follow her dream of winning a big race.

In 1997 she switched from 5,000- and 10,000-meter races to marathon training. In 1998 she set a new national record, and in 2000 she won the Olympic marathon in Sydney, Australia, becoming the first Japanese woman to win a gold medal in the marathon.

The lesson? If Naoko Takahashi had accepted the advice of friends and associates who told her she wasn't good enough, she would not have achieved her success in Sydney.

Be positive but realistic

It is a fact of life that you will probably have many people place limitations on you because of your economic status, education, a handicap or other factors.

When this happens it's easy to allow other people's negative words, and then your own negative thoughts, to dissuade you from your goals. But don't automatically accept people's comments as valid. In Philippians 4:13 Paul notes that we can do “all things” through Christ. With God's help you can accomplish more than you ever thought possible.

On the other hand, even while we're thinking positive, we need to be realistic. Don't take Paul's words as a promise God will back you up in anything you decide to do. Note the context of Paul's advice—judging from the wording of the previous verse, he learned to deal with hunger as well as prosperity.

Paul does not promise that God will make us successful in any area we happen to choose. A person who is color-blind cannot properly cite Paul's words here to believe God will help him become a successful artist, interior decorator or auto body repairman. Those vocations require the ability to work with hues and shades of color.

How can a person know, then, whether an imagined limitation imposed by someone else is spurious and to be ignored or if it represents the faithful "wounds of a friend" (Proverbs 27:6) who happens to know you're color-blind but are ill-advisedly pursuing a field that requires working with shades of color?

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell. This is where your knowledge, wisdom and network of friends again become important to you. If someone wants to limit you, consider his words carefully. If he sounds as if he may have a valid point, go to another trusted friend or adviser. Discuss the basis of the objection and ask for an honest evaluation. Someone who has your long-term best interests at heart can help you decide if this is indeed a reason to change your career goal or simply another obstacle that persistence and hard work can overcome.

Success requires effort

Success rarely falls into anyone's lap. It requires work. Keep in mind the following saying: *People who want milk should not seat themselves on a stool in the middle of a field in hopes that the cow will back up to them.*

To find a successful career, you have to dream. But do not *just* dream. *Plan* how you can achieve what you'd like so your dreams can come true. Ask for plenty of advice so you can make sure the career path you choose fits with your aptitudes, abilities and skills as well as with God's goals. Then pour yourself into your pursuit, remembering to build and draw on your network of advisers and friends who can help you surmount whatever obstacles life may place in your way.

Recommended reading

The Bible is packed with practical, timeless guidance on the major issues of life. [*Making Life Work*](#) has some of the Bible's best advice on career, finances, friendship—as well as marriage, parenting and family issues. You can download this booklet or order a free copy to be mailed to you.

Has Christ Failed?

By Jay Turner

The Bible tells us God wants all people to be saved. So what are we to make of the fact that only a third of the world is even nominally Christian?

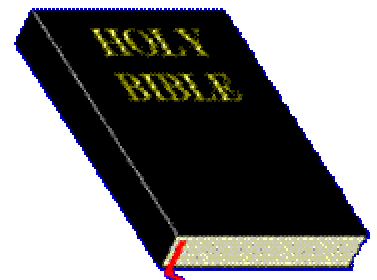


SINCE THE START OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION and the advent of Darwinism, Christian institutions have been very much under siege. Not only is church attendance way down (especially in Europe), but also there are fewer and fewer among the ranks of nominal Christians who have anything like the deep devotion and faith we read about in the pages of the New Testament. Christianity is fast becoming little more than an ethnic heritage. And even nominal Christians are a minority in the world—only about one third of the world’s current population is even nominally Christian. Yet the New Testament lays down very stringent requirements to be a follower of Christ—so only a tiny fraction of even the nominal Christians meet the scriptural standard of what it means to be a disciple. Relatively few people are being saved—yet God says that He wants *all* people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4).

Has Christ failed? Is God unable or unwilling to reach out to mankind and save the world? Why is the world still shrouded in darkness, when the followers of Christ have had almost 2,000 years to spread the word?

Prophesied long ago

The erosion of Christianity is not new, and it is not a surprise. Christ spoke of it, and revealed it to the apostles—both during His ministry and in the vision given to John in the book of Revelation. Paul, John and Jude all mentioned it. The outward, visible signs of collapse that have appeared over the last two centuries are just the most recent manifestations of a process that has been going on since the first century.



Paul warned the church at Thessalonica that they would encounter false teachers who would say that Christ's return was imminent (2 Thessalonians 2:1-7). He gave them one sign to look for in determining whether the end of the age really was near: There must first be a great apostasy. The King James Version renders the Greek word *apostasia* as "falling away"—that there must "come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed" (verse 3). Paul went on to say that this evil was already active in the world in their time: "For the mystery of iniquity [evildoing] doth already work..." (2 Thessalonians 2:7). One of the major signs of Christ's return is a great falling away from the truth—the erosion of Christianity on a grand scale.

The words of Jesus agree that the end of the age will be a terrible time to be a Christian: "Then they will deliver you up to tribulations and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:9-12). It will be so hard to hold on to our faith that Jesus lamented, "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

Ambitious men have always grabbed for power over the organized Church. We have the first-century examples of Diotrephes, whom John denounced in 3 John 1:9-10, and Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24), who tried to buy his way into the ministry. Gibbons' *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* details many more such accounts in later centuries. In the end time, the use of religion for personal and political gain will be as bad as it's ever been. That is one reason why the love of many will wax cold. People will be thoroughly disillusioned with religion.

One reaction to the apparent failure of organized Christianity to win the hearts and minds of the human race has been to water down the requirements for being a Christian. The New Testament is very specific about what God expects of Christians, and yet preachers have failed to teach this to prospective converts. In their urgent passion to get as many people "saved" as possible, they have filled their churches with people whose commitment is shallow—people who have no idea what it means to be a Christian—and who will quit just as quickly as they joined. It is a great disservice to give people a false sense of security in their relationship to Christ. So many people are unaware of what they *must* do to be secure in their salvation. They will be shocked when their Lord says to them, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23). We are *commanded* to teach new converts the *full* teachings of Christ (Matthew 28:20). It is not enough to persuade people to accept Christ. That is only the beginning.

"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).



Generation after generation have grown up not knowing Christ, not knowing God's Word, not prepared to really grow as a Christian and not prepared to endure to the end. They, like the Church in Sardis, are alive in name only (Revelation 3:1). The Christian movement seems to have lost its momentum. In this age, the true knowledge of God is not sweeping the world—it's being swept aside and buried under a tidal wave of competing religious and philosophical ideas. And yet God inspired the prophets to speak of a time when everyone in the world would know Him and have opportunity to repent and receive His forgiveness. (Jeremiah 31:34;

Hebrews 8:11; Isaiah 40:3-5; Luke 3:3-6; Joel 2:28) and when the true knowledge of God would inundate the world as thoroughly as water covers the ocean floors (Isaiah 11:9).

How the world will be saved

The question is not whether God wants to, or can, save the world, but *when* He will do it! In this age, few are saved. In this age, salvation is by invitation from the Father only (John 6:44). The real age of salvation begins *after* Christ's return, when the devil is imprisoned (Revelation 20:1-3) and his dominion over this world is ended (2 Corinthians 4:4; Luke 4:5-6). Once Satan's spiritual broadcast of hate and filth is switched off (Ephesians 2:2; Revelation 20:3), the world will at last be receptive to God's spirit. The salvation of the world fundamentally cannot be accomplished as long as Satan is on the loose.

All those then living will be called to salvation. And all those who have lived down through the ages without being invited to salvation, will be raised to life and called to salvation in the judgment period (Ezekiel 36:27; 37:13-14; John 5:25, 28; Revelation 20:4-16).

To read more about how and when God will save the world, request your free copies of the United Church of God publications [The Gospel of the Kingdom](#) and [Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?](#)

Hasty Judgments

By John and Joanne Rutis

Are we too quick to judge others? What do we base those judgments on and how does God feel about our judgment of others?



MY FAMILY AND I WERE GATHERED around my mother's bedside when a young man who worked for the convalescent center entered the room. My wife tells the story far better than I could; here's what she wrote:

As soon as he stepped into the room, I formed an opinion of him.

The young man had long hair pulled back in a ponytail. A large metal ring protruded from one ear. His body, though covered with a white lab coat, seemed to me thin and weakly.

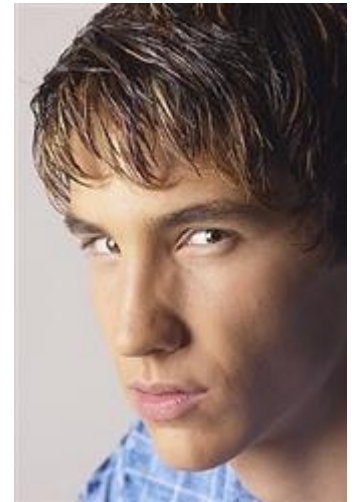
I imagine you've formed an opinion of him just from this description.

Without looking in my direction, he approached my mother-in-law's bedside. "How are you today, Thelma?" he asked in a pleasant, cheerful voice that somehow didn't go with the perception I had formed of him.

Of course, Thelma wasn't at all well. She had come to the convalescent center with the knowledge that her days were numbered. Her kidneys had failed and she was slowly dying. It was small wonder, then, that she had complaints. As I watched the young man listening patiently to her list of woes and trying as best he could to alleviate them, my perception of him changed.

Here was a young man who genuinely cared about people. He did not have a prestigious job. In fact, he probably got paid little for his labor. Yet he was putting his whole heart into what he did; trying his best to ease the discomfort of those whose lives were drawing to an end.

I had much the same first impression of this young man. My wife and I didn't realize that when we judged this young worker because of his appearance we were failing to follow God's instruction found in John 7:24: "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." We made a mistake. Yet it's a mistake we've all been guilty of at one time or another. Judging others based on what they look like is a human trait that is difficult to overcome. Of course, part of the reason we make hasty judgments is because sometimes they work. Sometimes a person does reflect their character in how they look. In this particular case, however, we were able to see our mistake and changed our opinion of the young worker.



How often, though, do our judgments based on outward appearance have long-lasting consequences? Such mistakes can harm relationships, and if we voice or act on our judgment, it can negatively effect how others view the person we've judged. We should not show any kind of favoritism or bias based on outward appearance.

God shows no partiality

The Bible tells us repeatedly that God is not a respecter of persons. He shows no partiality. Yet it's so easy for us, as physical human beings, to look on the outward appearance and decide what a person is like inside, showing partiality to some while disdaining others.

There are six direct statements in the Bible that say that God is no respecter of persons, and I'm sure there are many more indirect statements. If we are to reflect God's character, doesn't it follow that we, too, should not show partiality? In fact, let's look at James 2:9 and see just how

seriously God views this matter: “But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” That’s pretty serious.

Let’s look at how God judges a person. In 1 Peter 1:17 we read, “And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear.”

God has one set of rules for everyone. He judges without partiality. You’ll find in Colossians 3:24-25 that slaves and masters will receive the same reward and the same punishment. God doesn’t look at social status. God judges us according to what we DO with what we have. God looks on our heart and our willingness to serve others (1 Samuel 16:7).

If you read Galatians 3:28, you will find that, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

The world’s way

We know that, in the world, things don’t usually work that way. Studies show that teachers, even female teachers, show partiality to the boys in their classes, calling on them more often than they do the girls. An attractive young woman gets faster and better service at the store than does an older person. We’ve come to expect that sort of treatment.

But, sad to say, some who claim the name of Christ fall into the same trap.

James addressed such a problem in James 2:1-4: “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy [“shabby” in the New International Version and Revised Standard Version] clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and say to the poor man, ‘You stand there,’ or, ‘Sit here at my footstool,’ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?”

Along a similar vein, I recall sitting in a youth-oriented meeting several years back, where a woman rose and gave an opinion on a particular subject. Little attention was paid to the idea. A few moments later a man rose and said almost the same thing word for word, and the idea was jumped on as though it were something new and wonderful. The gentleman in charge didn’t realize that he had shown partiality just as surely as had the people who had respect to the richly clothed individual over the poorly dressed one.

Of course, it could have just as easily been a young person who was slighted or an old person, or a person in out-of-style clothing, or a short person, or a person with a physical handicap. The list of people who are judged by outward appearance to be less worthy is extensive.



Instead of judging others by their outward body, we need to be busy taking on the mind of Christ. It's a mind that holds no partiality and that looks on each individual as a potential member of the Family of God.

Righteous judgments

Does that mean that we can't make any judgments where others are concerned? Far from it! We are instructed to make righteous judgment. That judgment is based on what a person DOES, not on their outward appearance.

We find in 1 Corinthians 6:2-3 that the saints will judge the world. Let's take a closer look at what it says. "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you will judge the world, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?"

God expects us to make judgments. But they must be righteous judgments. Our judgments are not based on whether a person is a Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. That's NOT how God judges a person. For we know that the Bible tells us we are all ONE in Christ Jesus and that God doesn't show partiality.

Righteous judgments are judgments based on God's law and whether or not a person is following God's teaching. God doesn't really care if you have a Ph.D. behind your name, or what your body looks like or how young or old you are. He does not care if you are male or female. God looks on the heart and that is what we need to be doing (1 Samuel 16:7).

Let's stop forming hasty judgments based on outward appearance. Let's make sure that all our judgments are righteous judgments. Remember also that judgment should begin with us. If we are busy getting the beam out of our own eye, we will be far less concerned about the speck in our brother's eye.

Remember that God is no respecter of persons. He can use us all no matter what our outward appearance or state. We need to be using the talents God has given each one of us, working together as a team, and be busy doing His work.

‘Why Have You Made Me Like This?’

By Robert Berendt

Some things we can and should change about ourselves. Other things we didn't choose and can't change, no matter how we try. How should we deal with the way we're made?



AMONG ALL OF THE INNER FEELINGS and forces that drive mankind, few are as painful as being unhappy with ourselves. We have not made ourselves. As children, we did not choose our parents, gender, language, training or experiences of life. Our heredity and environment shaped who we are, and now we have to live with it.

Once we are adults, we may have the chance to learn new things and change what we are. Yet people living in some remote tribe with a fixed behavior pattern are truly shackled and unable to make many changes. Poverty shackles a person as well.



Someone once said, “Life is unfair—get used to it.” There is a lot in that short sentence. Our frustrations and ultimate pain (mental and physical) can rise out of our efforts to change ourselves into something that we aren't. Sometimes we chafe against our Creator rather than listen to Him. We ask, “Why have you made me like this?” (Romans 9:20). When things do not go the way we want them to go, we would like to “be someone else” or at least have something changed.

Disagreements about sex

God created us male and female. He created us with the highest sex drive from teenage to age 35. Women begin to be less able to conceive after age 30. He created us with sex drives so we will have children and love our mates. His system allows for the development of a family—a family that starts with the interest of a man and a woman for each other, the coming of children, and the growth of love and appreciation for one another.

Too often we humans disagree! We think God made a mistake. We know better. We think sex is only for fun and the more you have, the more fun it is. We think children are a drag. Even if we

say we want children, we think our young adult years should be for fun, fun, fun . The children can wait until we get close to 40.

We show off our bodies and tie sex into everything that we want to sell, advertise, teach or use. We have developed birth control methods that allow us to put self-control and responsibility behind us and just have “fun.” And if all else fails, many believe abortion is an option.

We want to spend our young adult years having fun and leave the serious things like career and family for our 40s. We struggle against nature—against God. We blame God for giving us AIDS and then strive to find a cure so that we can go on living just the way we please. Forty million people are dying of AIDS, but we will not learn.

God did create sex to be enjoyed and to bring delight for married couples. But pleasure without major problems only happens when His way is followed.

We say, “Why have you made me like this?”—and want to change it.

When birth control becomes irreversible

A recent study shows that long-term use of birth control pills can triple or, in some cases, even quadruple the risk of cervical cancer in women. Many young women who start on the pill as teenagers find that the body can react with abnormal cell growth, which leads to many other problems—like making it impossible to have children later.



One of the greatest challenges psychiatrists say they face is dealing with women over 40 who now desperately want children, which they refused to have when God designed them to be mothers. In Canada, the average family is 1.5 children now—not enough to sustain our population. Our way of life is in jeopardy because we defy God and want to do things “our way.”

We’ll never admit to that. We have many excuses and reasons, but all of them sound very hollow when you look back on your life.

Lest some misunderstand, let me say that just because a person is at the prime of life for childbearing or a sexual relationship, does not mean he or she should rush into anything. If responsibility, maturity, consideration and respect for self and others have not been developed, then that person is not properly prepared for marriage or parenthood.

Our society is falling woefully short of the task of training our children to be responsible for what they do and who they are. Children need to know that God made us male and female for a very good reason. The drive for sexual gratification is a blessing God gives—when used properly. It is a curse when we think we know better than God.

I have met many a man who in his later years bitterly regretted the result of his life and wished he could have had one wife and children more than anything else.

He made us like Him

Our Creator made us as we are to enable us to be more like Him by making the right choices. We need to learn self-control and the use of wisdom. Many people have ended their lives in sorrow as they finally realized that they were their own worst enemy through the choices they made.

The book of Ecclesiastes was inspired by God to help us understand the pattern too many follow. It tells of an intelligent man who had everything, tried everything, did everything his way and was totally unhappy. We read in Ecclesiastes 2:9-11 that after he tried everything, he realized that “all was vanity [futility, for no purpose].”

Wisdom, high IQ and any other blessing or gift that a person has is largely wasted unless it is developed and used properly. His final conclusion is found in Ecclesiastes 12:13 where we read: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all [‘the whole duty of man,’ King James Version].”

Learning from others’ examples

God knew humans would not listen to Him. We can and do learn, though. Some of the lessons are very painful. Luke 15 carries the story of the prodigal son. He had a ball until all his money was gone, and suddenly he was not so popular. In the end, he went home and tried to start over.

Starting over is not always possible. One always hopes one can, but there are always scars that we carry. Our memory remains and even those who come to God in deep repentance will carry their memories and scars to their graves. We are made that way.

There is a great lesson that we can take from the life of Joseph. It would have been easy for him to grow bitter. He was in a bad predicament for years because He relied on God and tried to obey God every day. He learned to accept the situation and yet look for ways to improve himself and the conditions around him. God was always there, and when Joseph was trained and ready, God stepped in and life was beautiful for him once again.

The lesson is that we must trust God. We must work with all our might to improve ourselves and our lot in life with God’s help, yet pray as though all our progress depends on God to intervene in times of trouble. The lesson seems simple, but it is learned through pain and suffering by many.

We are what we are—complaining will not change that. Building on what we are and having God as our helper is the answer (Psalm 30:10; 54:4). Now all we need to do is look for the right pieces of knowledge to apply in every situation. You will find the foundation for that knowledge in God’s guidebook—the Bible.



Recommended reading

We may not be able to change our genetics or some parts of our environment, but we can make major improvements in the most important aspects of life—our relationships. [Making Life Work](#) contains helpful tips and biblical principles for better relationships with family and friends and God. You can read it online or request a free copy be mailed to you.

Letters to the Editor

Encouraging children



I read with interest your article on encouraging children. As a grandparent I discovered a fun and easy way to do it. I had never heard of anyone doing it before, but I thought it was neat. Upon the birth of each granddaughter, I dubbed her with a special name from Grandma. Our firstborn, Madison, became “Grandma’s Bundle of Joy.” Our second born, Brianna, became “Grandma’s Ray of Sunshine.” Each one learned her own special name early. Each one enjoys the fact that it is not shared with her sister.

— Marilyn Braley, Houston, Texas

My Name Is Gossip



Thank you for your article on gossip. I looked at a few articles—all of them good. However, this one was the most helpful. The story about the rabbi [was helpful]. As you said, you can't change people. However, I can change how I receive them, and this article helped me. Thank you.

— L. Arnone

Special thanks



It is difficult to believe that anyone else could possibly inspire the articles in any of the publications of UCG other than God through His Holy Spirit. A special thanks to all of you.

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity