

# Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement  
For The Real World

*"Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ,  
and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place."—2 Corinthians 2:14*

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## Building a Solid Foundation—Part 2

By Jean Jantzen

*Laying a solid foundation for correct behavior is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children. Consistency of expectations and not tolerating unacceptable behaviors is a start. But we also should teach basic manners and respect towards others. Mealtime and playtime can be useful in teaching the “lost art” of etiquette.*



**I**N [LAST MONTH'S ARTICLE](#) on child rearing we learned there is a way to lay a solid foundation that will benefit our family and our children now, in the future and on into the wonderful world tomorrow. The very first step is to take charge of the very young child, to be consistent in our expectations of what their behavior should be, and to regard unacceptable behavior as unacceptable at any age. But, we may ask, how can we find time to teach our growing children respect, responsibility and restraint in our busy daily routine? Playtime and dinnertime are perfectly suited for teaching these important concepts.

According to *The Emily Post Book of Etiquette for Young People*, etiquette is useful “in order to make a home a livable place... Teaching us to respect the rights and the individualism of each member of the family can serve to improve the unity of the whole.”

*We don't want just blind obedience; we want children who learn to reflect on the consequences of their actions before they act.*

In *The Disappearance of Childhood* Neil Postman asserts that homogenization of dress, action and language is blurring the roles of children and adults. In particular; dirty words are shared and freely used by both. Some may think, “So what?” But, according to Dr. Postman, this backlash leads to “the erosion of a traditional distinction between children and adults...also significant because it represents a loss in the concept of manners. Indeed, as language, clothing, taste, eating habits, etc., become increasingly homogenized there is a corresponding decline in both the practice and meaning of ‘civility.’”

We can offset these trends by using good English ourselves, restricting television, monitoring our children’s friends and reestablishing some civility in our lives.

### Teaching manners at the dinner table

Civility comes from the word *civilized*, meaning “a society that has come to a high level of cultural refinement, including proper dress, manners and behavior.” Civility was, for the most part, taught and practiced at the dinner table or other social events revolving around eating. Now, it seems, priorities have changed, and etiquette has taken a backseat.

But learning good manners around the dinner table goes way beyond just being able to take your children out. It teaches habits of respect, responsibility and restraint. Children who are taught to speak at the table, with parents constructively guiding the conversation, are more likely to know how and when to converse in private and public situations. They will learn to respect others’ input; they will learn their contribution is important; and they will also learn self-restraint. These habits will hold them in good stead growing up and as an adult in any social situation.

*Instead of allowing a free-for-all or eating separately, we can use the dinner hour not only as a pleasant social gathering, but also as a valuable tool to teach our children.*

I know we live busy lives now, but instead of allowing a free-for-all or eating separately, we can use the dinner hour not only as a pleasant social gathering, but also as a *valuable tool to teach* our children priceless and long-lasting lessons of life. Start by having them wash their hands and face, comb their hair, sit quietly, say please and thank you and take turns talking.

Nomi Samson of Port Alberni, British Columbia, says teaching manners at home pays off. “The waitresses swarm around me when I take my two young boys to the restaurant. They make a fuss over my children and remark how well they behave in comparison to others.”

Dinner used to be a formal occasion—a special time of the day. The table settings and atmosphere were carefully prepared. One’s place at the table was always the same. Children, as well as parents, freshened themselves up from the labor of the day. Many of us today look back at the formality, the decorum, the rules and regulations of the dinner table and reject them as being old-

fashioned or too time consuming. Certainly some families were overly rigid in this regard, but the pendulum has now swung to the opposite extreme.

*Play helps children learn social skills, sharing, problem solving and allows them to work through difficulties.*

Robert Aller, an 83-year-old Canadian artist, remembers his childhood dinners as a time to practice listening: “Father was the only one to speak at the table. He told stories. ....But the children were not to speak unless spoken to. And we knew that. And actually, I did not feel curbed at all because I chatted like a chatterbox and everyone else chattered as they wanted to, apart from the table, and because father told stories. If there was something that we wanted, more food, or whatever it was, a bowl further on down the table that we couldn’t reach, then we would ask ‘please may I have the potatoes,’ and when it was given to you, you said, ‘thank you’—and you never missed the please and you never missed the thank you.”

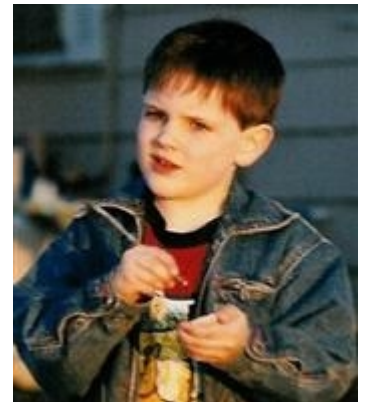
I’m not suggesting children need to be silent at the table, but it is still good to teach listening and taking turns talking.

Mr. Aller also remembers being taught as a child to “never correct adults, but just listen. I corrected them in my mind. But that was OK because it taught me not to call anyone down, especially someone older than myself.” He says that remains a valuable lesson to this day. “If you tell someone where to go, you have just canceled off a possible friend.”

Teaching etiquette at an early age offers both children and adults freedom—freedom to enjoy each other’s company. Not only will we enjoy our meals, but we will also grow in love toward each other.

### Life lessons, not blind obedience

We don’t want just blind obedience; we want children who learn to reflect on the consequences of their actions before they act. I think it’s useful to examine the importance of *why* children listen and obey and how it may help them commit to good behavior later. The developing child should be told why a particular action is desired—for example, why he should tell the truth, not hurt another person, show respect for the elderly, or not take others’ belongings—as soon as he is able to understand. Over time, these principles must be internalized so the child will take personal responsibility for his choices rather than simply responding to reward or punishment.



However, it’s becoming common practice to hear parents sweet talk, coax, plead, cajole, warn and promise their children, until finally they find themselves yelling uncontrollably at their children in order to be heard and obeyed. Social psychologist Dr. Robert Cialdini, author of *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* notes, “We accept inner responsibility for a behavior when we think we have chosen to perform it in the absence of strong outside pressures.” Rewards and preachy stories, exhortations to be good and attempts to instill certain habits may work for a while, but they won’t get the child to accept responsibility for his actions, good or bad. On the other hand, if we have established a solid foundation, parents should not have to promise rewards or strong threats.

## Play is the work of the young

Play also should not be overlooked as a tool for learning new physical, emotional and intellectual skills. Its main purpose, according to psychologist and teacher Dr. Catchpole, “is to slowly reduce egocentricity. Play is the work of the young.”

Play helps children learn social skills, sharing, problem solving and allows them to work through difficulties. Even the simple act of picking up toys helps teach respect and responsibility for their own possessions and others.



Tara Shulz, a mother of two, notes that play can be both positive and negative. “Three-year-old Kaleb loves to show his younger brother how to hold a stick to play floor hockey. It gives him confidence in his abilities and helps him learn to share. However, the younger one also picks up behaviors I do not approve of, such as using anything as a gun to shoot.” This is where the parents’ role is important in guiding—setting limits in some cases, being supportive in others.

Take the time and effort to teach good manners, cooperation and a sense of fair play, showing tenderness toward one another. This helps develop strong family ties and love for each other. We need to learn how to live together as one family.

Emily Post sums her book up nicely when she writes that *consideration*, whether at mealtime or playtime, “is the basis of etiquette—insight and understanding, self-control and discipline, loyalty, and finally a sense of justice are the timeless qualities that make life rewarding and pleasant.”

David rejoices in Psalm 133:1, telling us, “How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

## Recommended reading

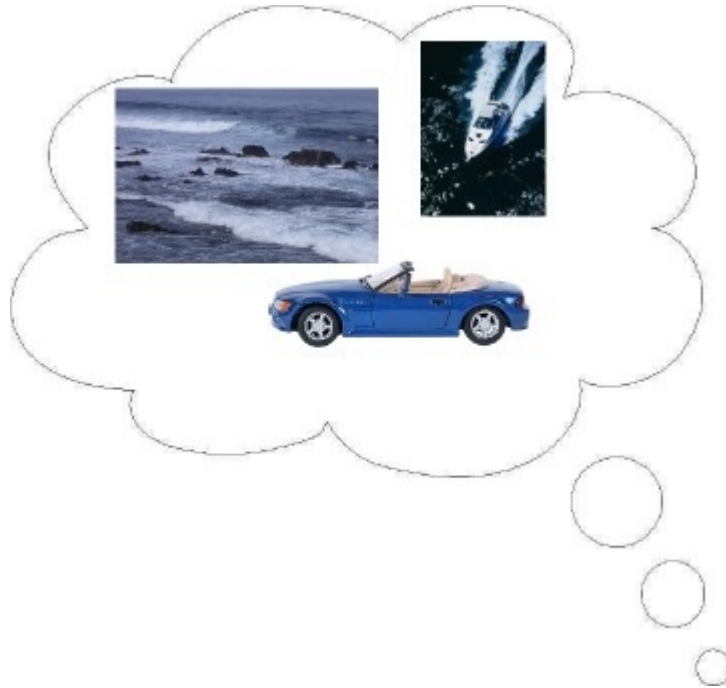
For more information on child rearing, please request or download our free booklet [Making Life Work](#).

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## Shaping Your Future

By Rod Hall

*How should we live our lives? Does it really matter what we say, do or even think? There is a way that is best to follow, but you must make the choice.*



**W**HEN WE ARE YOUNG we often have big dreams about what we want to become and what we want to accomplish in our lifetime. As Charles Kettering said, “We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there.” Your ultimate destiny and what you accomplish in life will, in large, be determined by the way you choose to live life on a daily basis. The principles you adopt and the philosophies you live by determine who you become and affect what you accomplish.

*Our character and who we become are a composite of the habits we live by.*

The saying is true: “Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.” Our character and who we become are a composite of the habits we live by. These habits mold and shape our ultimate destiny in this life. As radio talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger said, “The true measure of your character is not in your thoughts, but in your behavior, especially when you’re provoked.” Ultimately, you are what you choose to do.

There are basically two ways to live; one puts self ahead of everyone and everything. It is a life focused on self-centeredness, vanity, lust, greed, envy, strife and get (Galatians 5:19-21). Sadly, this is the foundation for the way most people live. It puts selfish accomplishments ahead of what God would have us become. With this “me first” approach to life, it is no wonder our world is filled with such conflict, strife, unhappiness, suffering and evil. These are the fruits of the way of life for most people, but it is opposite to the way God would have us live.

## The road less traveled

The second way to live is the only way to true happiness and contentment. It can lead to physical success and material blessing as well. It is a full abundant way of life that allows you to reach your full human potential. This way produces the good fruits of God's way of life (Galatians 5:22-24). It is also the way to eternal life and everlasting success.



This way of life is centered on the concepts and principles taught by Jesus Christ. It is the opposite of pride, arrogance and living only to accomplish selfish desires. It is outlined in the Bible and summarized in the Ten Commandments. It puts God and His ways first. It is based on our relationship with our Creator and God's eternal laws. It involves a life of personal growth in giving, sharing and helping others (Ecclesiastes 9:10; 11:9, Matthew 5:43-44).

## Free to choose

God gives us the opportunity to make our own decisions. Yet too many people live their lives as a big experiment, not really knowing what brings true happiness. Living life on the edge with no absolutes can be a very unstable and painful process. Experiencing the consequences of wrong decisions is a very destructive, frightening and futile process. However, most will not believe that God knows best until they spend a lifetime learning from the ways of life that do not work.

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God wants you to choose the way that leads to real, lasting and eternal success. God challenges you: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

## Support for success

Success requires you to make the right decisions, set the right goals and diligently work to accomplish them. The ultimate true success and happiness cannot be accomplished by individual effort and hard work alone. We all need help along the road to achieve our destiny. God is the only one who can supply the important ingredients we lack—His power, love, faith and divine guidance. If we choose God's way of life, we have a Helper, Counselor and Guide to show us the way (Hebrews 13:5-6). True success can only be achieved with the guidance, power and the Spirit of the living God (Zechariah 4:6).



You can have the best that life has to offer now and build a destiny that is



eternal in scope and unlimited in potential. For more helpful information, request our free booklets [Making Life Work](#) and [God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind](#). How you choose to shape your future now will determine your ultimate destiny.

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## Where Will the Genetics Revolution Lead?

By Noel Hornor

*This century has seen astounding scientific and technological advancement. Developments continue to amaze. But is all such advancement a good thing?*



**J**ULY 20 OF THIS YEAR marks the 30th anniversary of perhaps the most captivating moment in a century rich with technological achievements. A few years ago *U.S. News & World Report* called the first manned moon voyage “the signature of our century.” With this event mankind fulfilled a dream of decades. It seemed to many people at the time that we could accomplish almost anything.

In the 20th century one invention after another altered forever the course of history. Of all man has achieved, two developments seem to have brought about more sweeping changes than any other. These are the automobile in the first half of the century and the computer in the second.

If the 20th century gave us future shock, the pace of change in the 21st century will be even more dizzying. How fast is human knowledge advancing? “In the past decade, more scientific knowledge has been created than in all of human history” (Michio Kaku, *Visions: How Science Will Revolutionize the 21st Century*, 1998, p. 4).

British journalist Paul Johnson adds: “We may think science moved fast in the 20th century, but we are going to be dazzled by its acceleration in the century to come. And the rapid rise of the life sciences means that [with] many of the changes it will soon be in our power to make will be fundamental and irreversible” (*The Daily Mail* [London], May 22, 1999).



Keep in mind, as Mr. Johnson implies, the focus of technology has changed. Although still prominent, the main focus of science is no longer on outer space. It is on the inner space of the deoxyribonucleic-acid (DNA) molecule. The 21st century's frontier is the science of biotechnology.

If scientists are correct in their projections, the futuristic wave of genetics will present us with fascinating possibilities—and perplexing choices.

### Genetic engineering already here

For centuries mankind has manipulated genetics to ensure the passing on and strengthening of desirable traits in animals and plants. Humanity has seen many benefits from understanding and properly using genetics. Animals have been bred to be stronger, more hardy, to produce more wool, milk or meat. Strains of wheat, corn and rice have been created that produce more food while needing less fertilizer and water. Fast-growing trees provide more lumber, pulp, fuel and shade. Even flowers are bigger, more colorful, more beautiful than they would be otherwise.

But, since scientists began unlocking the secrets of DNA in the 1950s, genetic manipulation has taken new meaning. Researchers have discovered ways to change the inherited shape, form and function of living things by altering their genetic material. This process is known as *genetic engineering*.

All living cells—plant, animal and human—contain the genetic material DNA, which determines the attributes of the offspring of all living things. By directly manipulating that material, scientists can change inherited characteristics in predetermined ways.

*Such manipulation of genetic material is a reality.* Your world has probably already been affected by it. Many food products have been genetically altered. Tomatoes have been genetically manipulated to have a longer shelf life. Rice strains have been engineered to be disease-resistant. Genes of fish have been placed into potatoes and strawberries to make these plants more resistant to cold weather.

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Not all of these products are in commercial production yet, but work continues. Even so, a considerable amount of processed foods sold in Britain has in some way been genetically modified.

Scientists have also tinkered with livestock. Cows have been injected with growth hormones to increase their milk production. Attempts are underway to engineer sheep producing a chemical in their skin providing immunity to insect parasites. Researchers are attempting to develop herpes-proof pigs. These projects are only the tip of the iceberg.

### Genetic engineering: good or bad?

Not everyone views such tinkering as positive scientific advancement. Some, particularly in Europe, skeptically view it as an assault on nature. “If something goes wrong, how can it be put right? The truth is, nobody knows...And like some drug complications, ecological side-effects may take years to appear” (*The Economist*, June 13, 1998).

Some engineering of plants involves the use of virus particles. One concern is that this could result in the unintentional creation of viruses harmful to existing crops. Another concern is that, in the efforts to design plants that produce toxic chemicals that ward off their natural pests, chemicals might result that poison native animals or beneficial insects. The inadvertent production of allergens in foods is another concern.



Proponents of genetic engineering believe these risks are justified because of the potential such research offers to lessen the effects of food shortages and malnutrition.

If genetic manipulation of plants and animals causes concern, it is nothing compared to the concern in some quarters about genetic engineering in humans.

### **The Human Genome Project**

The seminal event for the science of genetic engineering occurred in 1953 when James Watson and Francis Crick discovered the structure of the DNA molecule. If this were the birth of modern genetics, many scientists believe the Human Genome Project (HGP) is its industrial revolution.

The HGP is a global scientific project, begun formally in 1990. Its director was Francis Collins of the National Institute of Health (NIH). He calls it “the most important scientific project mankind has ever mounted.”

The purpose of the project is to make a “map” of the approximately 100,000 human genes on the 23 pairs of chromosomes in the cells of our bodies. To read some of the many papers written on this subject go to:

[http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human\\_Genome/project/progress.shtml](http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/project/progress.shtml).

By unlocking the genetic code of life, scientists believe they may eventually have at their fingertips the power to heal diseases, create new species, fashion “designer children” and perhaps move closer to grasping the Holy Grail of immortality by reversing the aging process.

### **A new era in medicine**

Many diseases are influenced, at least in part, by genetic factors. Through the HGP, genes that are linked with various cancers, Alzheimer’s disease and diabetes have been pinpointed. Through such progress, geneticists hope to discover new ways to fight disease. Some believe it will be possible in a few years to develop custom-made drugs for the best fit to an individual’s body chemistry.

These possibilities excite scientists. Not only will this new knowledge deliver the potential to treat diseases, it will bring the possibility of *preventing* the diseases in the first place.

But, with the possibility of obtaining a read-out of our individual genetic makeup, we may be presented with a Pandora’s box of choices.

Genetic testing and screening could arm parents or prospective parents with the foreknowledge that they have the potential to beget a child with a serious physical impairment. As more disease-causing genes are identified, this will present painful choices, such as whether to abort or deliver an unborn child. Some parental carriers of the gene for cystic fibrosis have already faced this dilemma when they identified the disease in their developing fetus.

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Genetic blueprinting will beget a host of privacy concerns. Will governments at some point mandate genetic testing for couples seeking to get married? This is sure to raise serious concern about the prospect of government intervention. Would governments pressure pregnant women who are carrying defective fetuses to submit to abortions? Governments might conceivably do this out of concern over the financial burdens placed on their health-care systems by children with incurable lifelong afflictions requiring expensive care.

### Design your own child

If gene-manipulation procedures sufficiently improve to yield predictable results, what will happen then? Some believe it may be possible to design a dream child with the characteristics the parents desire in their offspring. Parents might be able to plan a customized child who is genetically disposed to be physically attractive, of superior intelligence or athletically talented.



On the other end of the spectrum, if certain genetic traits are associated with physical violence, totalitarian societies might move to counter with this by targeting those who are considered apt to commit or have committed felonious acts. These concerns may seem far-fetched to some, but they should not be dismissed, given that attempts at ethnic cleansing have been a sad reality in several regions in recent years.

### Is it right or wrong?

Is there such a thing as right or wrong in these matters? Does genetic engineering or cloning have anything to do with God? Many in the field of science do not believe in God, so to them it is a nonissue. But those who believe God exists need to address the matter of what He may think.

After God created life on earth—plants and animals—He proclaimed it all to be very good (Genesis 1:31). God also declared that sanctity exists between species. Everything, including plants (Genesis 1:11-12), animals and man (Genesis 1:24-28), was created to reproduce “according to its kind.” In Genesis, *kind* is generally equivalent to a species.

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Genetic engineering is an attempt to improve on what God made. God designed into every species considerable genetic diversity and potential, which is why we see hundreds of different breeds of dogs, cats, birds and cows, along with billions of people, all different. As noted earlier, humans for centuries have used this diversity to produce stronger, more productive, more beneficial plants and animals.

But could taking genetic engineering a quantum leap forward produce unforeseen problems?

“Researchers in the field of molecular biology are arguing that there is nothing particularly sacred about the concept of species” (Michael J. Reiss and Roger Straughan, *Improving Nature? The Science and Ethics of Genetic Engineering*, 1996, p. 64). In reality, such genetic engineering amounts to tampering with God’s creation. Those who call for caution are wise in having and voicing concerns. “No new scientific or technological development can claim immunity from ethical scrutiny” (Reiss and Straughan, p. 6).

In addition to protecting individual species, we should also be concerned about the environment in a larger sense. Just because we can do certain things technologically does not mean we can do them *safely*.

At one time nuclear power plants seemed like a brilliant idea, but a string of nuclear-power-plant disasters has dimmed their luster. Decades ago nations embarked on a binge of building nuclear facilities without adequately thinking through long-term storage solutions for radioactive wastes. Humanity has a long history of shortsightedness when it comes to considering the possible consequences of our actions. The potential for ecological damage to other plants and animals from genetic engineering should raise warning flags.

### Genetic tinkering gone awry

A case in point is a United States experiment in which pigs were given a human growth hormone gene in hopes they would put on weight faster. They put on weight but were also partially blind and arthritic and developed ulcers. Is this the way God wants us to manage His creation?

Among the dangers we face with plants is that an altered plant might bring unforeseen consequences to the environment. Researchers recently found that one variety of genetically engineered corn produced pollen toxic to monarch butterflies. Others raise the concern manipulated plants could become “weeds” with no useful purpose and the potential to run amok. Man has often introduced animals or plants to areas in which they were not indigenous, only to see them become a major nuisance harmful to other species in the area and impossible to eradicate.

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***The bottom line is that man’s attempts to improve on God’s handiwork can—and do—sometimes backfire.***

Genetic engineering of humans and cloning is an area where man should tread with a special awe. Evolutionists believe man is simply the highest life form. With knowledge of genetics, some are tempted to look at man simply as so much genetic material to be manipulated in an attempt to improve the human species. The truth is God designed man to be the highest form of physical life—made in the very image of God—and with the wondrous potential of becoming a part of His family. (To better understand this astounding truth, please request our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*)

### Misplaced priorities

The desire to alleviate human suffering through genetic engineering may spring from good intentions, but we should consider why sickness and disease exist. One of the reasons, simply put,

is sin and abuse of our bodies. The health costs from alcohol abuse, illegal drug use, smoking, sexually transmitted diseases and improper diet, not to mention crime and violence as a means to solving problems, is staggering.

The problem man most needs to address—but we frequently ignore—is the need to change our nature rather than trying to improve on the physical design of mankind.

As with many other contemporary issues, some will use the issue of freedom as a trump card to get their way. Some cloning advocates speak of “human procreative liberty.” Do we have a right to clone outweighing other ethical considerations?

Are we, without adequately considering the consequences, tampering with society’s building block, the family? “Whether or not we know it, the severing of procreation from sex, love and intimacy is inherently dehumanizing, no matter how good the product” (*Flesh Of My Flesh, Ethics of Cloning Humans*, Gregory E. Pence, ed., 1998, p. 26).

In God’s plan, children should come into the world in a stable home environment founded on a committed marriage between a man and woman (Genesis 2:24). At one time this was the cultural norm in most nations. This standard has been shattered in recent decades by a series of cultural earthquakes and repeated assaults on the family. Manufacturing children by cloning could prove to be another step in the further disintegration of the family.

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### **Where will all this lead?**

As humanity enters the 21st century, with an incredible arsenal of technology in our possession, we will be wise to consider what can happen to a civilization that is infatuated with its own wisdom and rejects the knowledge of God.

The world in the days before the flood of Noah had rejected God’s ways. “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). The result of living that way was destruction. We would do well to heed the lesson of what can happen to a society rejecting the knowledge of God.

One of the gravest dangers of our modern, technologically advanced society is the power we have created to destroy all human life. Man has possessed this frightening potential for some time—since harnessing the power of the atom to create enough nightmarish nuclear weapons to eliminate all life on earth many times over.

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In the wrong hands, biotechnology can be a grave danger. Germ weapons could be used by rogue nations or terrorist groups, or even by misguided individuals, to devastate entire countries. Karl Johnson of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta expressed this very concern: “Any crackpot with a few thousand dollars’ worth of equipment and a college biology education under his belt could manufacture bugs that would make Ebola look like a walk around the park” (Kaku, p. 258).

Jesus Christ prophesied a time when the survival of human life would be jeopardized. “It will be a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again,” He warns. “If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive...” (Matthew 24:21-22, Revised English Bible).

As we move rapidly down the pathway of scientific progress, mankind moves closer to the very moment Jesus predicted. When that time comes, we will discover that the god of technology will not be able to save us. Our deliverance will come from God alone.

### Recommended reading

God has a plan for mankind. Read more by requesting our free booklet [What Is Your Destiny?](#)

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## Meaningful Hope for Christians With Chronic Illnesses

By Cecil Maranville

*Through the ages people have sought comfort from the Psalms, finding their messages as soothing as a loving touch. But for a person dealing with chronic physical or emotional pain, the Psalms present another level of comfort. In this article you will read an overview of those songs that relate to chronic pain, fatigue, depression, disability and anxiety.*



**I**F YOU POSSESS A STRONG BELIEF IN GOD and also endure a chronic illness, you probably have struggled with your faith. Why hasn't God made you well? Without doubt, you have prayed for just such a miracle, as have friends and family. The fact that your physical pain remains month after month—or even year after year—may well have caused you heavy discouragement.

It is easy to assume that if one seeks to live by God's will and loves Him, God will always relieve that one's physical suffering. Yet, there you (or those you know and love) are—still bound by pain, disease or disability. Does the lack of physical relief mean that there is something wrong spiritually?

I would like to take you on a brief survey of the Psalms of the Bible to challenge that assumption. Many of us regularly read the Psalms for comfort and encouragement, but I wonder how many have noticed that several of these beloved songs, speak about people of faith who suffer from chronic illnesses.

### First, think about this...

Before looking into Psalms, let's lay a little groundwork with two references from the second letter to the Corinthian Christians. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, the apostle Paul assures his readers that they—these are Christians, remember—have the opportunity to experience spiritual comfort from God when they endure troubles. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” Therein lies a concept that is foreign to many: Christians can have enduring and chronic troubles.

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*Many of us regularly read the Psalms for comfort and encouragement, but I wonder how many have noticed that several of these beloved songs, speak about people of faith who suffer from chronic illnesses.*

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You have to experience trouble before comfort means anything. Try a simple, perhaps silly, experiment to illustrate the point. Pick up a small child who isn't upset or hurt, and begin to pat him or her on the back, softly speaking reassurances that everything will be all right. The child is likely to think you are a little strange! Do the same actions for a child who has fallen and gotten scraped, and comfort becomes meaningful—and appreciated.

You see the point. We all want to experience the comforting love of God, yet would rather avoid needing that comfort. Comfort, however, is meaningless if we have no need for it.

Within this passage are three plain messages:

- Christians experience trouble.
- God is fully aware of their suffering. (Why do we sometimes have difficulty in realizing that there are no secrets from Him?)
- Instead of always removing that trouble, God sometimes chooses to give only spiritual comfort. That is a different course of action than many expect from God.

If physical relief were the most important thing for God to grant, He would certainly provide it! Of course, God does not bring troubles on us, but neither does He spare us completely from accident or disease. The health of the spirit is sometimes not attained, or even thought of, until the health of the body is lost. We have to conclude that spiritual comfort is therefore more important than physical comfort. Think about that statement.

### The indisputable value of hurting

Paul also draws our attention to the understanding that Christians who suffer gain about others with all types of physical and emotional pain. Has someone who has never had pain ever offered you comfort? What about someone who has had severe pain?



Which person would offer more meaningful comfort? Which one would you seek out if you had to choose a helper again? It's obvious that there is great training value in enduring troubles. You have to experience trouble before comfort means anything. Christians are supposed to gain experience with all kinds of difficulties, work their way through them with the comfort of God and His people, and then pass along sympathy, empathy, caring and comfort to other people who hurt.



People can provide support to those wrestling with the challenges of illnesses. Obvious acts of kindness include listening, reading aloud, providing or preparing meals, doing household chores, sending cards and many more that you could name. But genuine comfort is often communicated beyond words and actions through an attitude of understanding.

That depth of understanding comes only by having been through a similar challenge. It is priceless training, equipping the Christian to extend faith to those who truly need it.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul draws an analogy between mortal men and jars of clay that hold a valuable treasure. The less you value the clay pot, the more you concentrate on what is inside of it. By contrast, the beautifully ornate container of a treasure becomes an item of worth in itself, and can distract attention from the true treasure inside.

His point is crystal clear. The spiritual health of a man is a treasure. His physical condition may be like crumbling old clay, but that will only highlight the infinitely greater value of a spiritually healthy mind, the inner treasure.

### A treasure trove of consolation

Now we'll move into the Psalms. People through the ages have sought comfort from these ancient songs, as they are refreshing as a cool cloth on a fevered brow. For a person dealing with chronic physical or emotional pain, there is a multi-faceted message. What follows is a brief sketch of those songs that relate to chronic pain, fatigue, depression, disability and anxiety. Notice that spiritual comfort was available, even when physical comfort was delayed. I've used the New International Version for its thought-for-thought translation pattern that expresses the intent clearly.

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**Psalm 6:** Notice the language with which the chronically ill can so easily identify: "I am faint...my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish...I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping...My eyes grow weak with sorrow." Sober thoughts of the possibility of death are seriously weighed. The song concludes with an uplifting sense of hope and relief of mind.

**Psalm 8:** Here's a contrast between the frailties of man and the majesty of God. As Paul later wrote, when a man is frail, he can understand that contrast more clearly. That is a healthy mental or spiritual perspective.

**Psalm 10:** The author felt alone, helpless, overwhelmed by trouble and grief—all too familiar to one who has chronic pain! Again, he is able to find bolstering for his spirit, although not necessarily for his body.

**Psalm 11:** This author writes of God being a safe place for him, like a bird can take to the air and fly high above any threat. These are comforting, releasing thoughts.

**Psalm 13:** This author felt abandoned, struggling with his gloomy thoughts, unable to make sense of his awful trials. He was depressed every day. The song ends with his recapturing a confidence that things will be OK; he's cheerful, even feels like singing! These are thoughts of coping. It doesn't mean the difficulty ended.

**Psalm 23:** This classic song speaks of walking "through the valley of the shadow of death," or alternatively, "through the darkest valley," without anxiety! It declares that a person can be restored, refreshed in spirit, while greatly challenged physically.

**Psalm 25:16 17:** This writer expresses his loneliness, depression, suffering and stress overload in the context of drawing spiritual courage.

**Psalm 31:7, 9-10:** In these few verses, we glean a picture of a person who is anguished or torn up, overwhelmed both mentally and physically. Note the chronic nature of the affliction, lasting a period of years. His choice of words, "my bones grow weak," graphically portrays chronic fatigue.

**Psalm 32:3 4:** Here's yet another chronic ailment that causes the author to say "my bones wasted away"—another description of fatigue. So also is the analogy of chronic illness that saps his strength like oppressive summertime heat and humidity drains one's energy.

### **"Crushed in spirit"**

**Psalm 34:4, 6, 8, 15, 17 19:** This person is burdened with many anxieties and fears—"complexes," we might say today. He has multiple trials of life and feels like he needs a safe place to crawl into and get away from everything. His troubles, too, are chronic. Note how he feels brokenhearted, "crushed in spirit." How descriptive! We are told in plain language that a right living man can have many troubles.

**Psalm 38:** This song is incredible! The subject has wretched health, is chronically fatigued and overwhelmed by a sense of guilt, all at the same time. (He directly associates immoral conduct with his physical problems. Sometimes diseases are caused by immoral behavior. It is healthy to look at oneself to see if any conduct needs to change. It is unhealthy to beat oneself up looking for some evil cause of an illness, because often there is none.) He tells of festering, unpleasant sores, depression lasting days on end and searing back pain, all without any kind of support group. What did he do? He prayed and thereby went after the one kind of health still available to him, a healthy mind.

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*Christians are supposed to gain experience with all kinds of difficulties, work their way through them with the comfort of God and people, and then pass along sympathy, empathy, caring and comfort to other people who hurt.*

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**Psalm 41:** This psalm speaks of God’s special concern for the physically weak, and how the sick person is sustained while on his sickbed. A “bed of illness” may imply a chronic illness. Here is an indisputable demonstration of how God can and does strengthen the mind, when He sometimes allows the body to weaken.

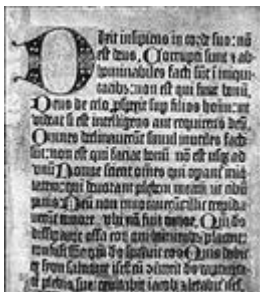
**Help for enduring difficult trials**

**Psalms 42, 43, 57 and 63** all have messages about chronic illness, similar to those already analyzed. But there are still some unique messages in other songs.

**Psalm 72:12-14** speaks of strengthening and encouraging the mind of the helpless, the afflicted (by disease or other troubles) and the victims of violent crimes.

**Psalm 77** is a record of sleepless nights, long hours of self analysis and growing discouragement. The author speaks of the positive use of meditation to get back to strong spiritual health.

**Psalm 84** is a beautifully written poetic expression of the restful, healthy result of a strong spirit.



**Psalm 88:15-18** mentions one who has been stricken with a life threatening illness since childhood. He is both fatigued and depressed. For some reason, he has neither friend nor relative to comfort him. Soberly, there is no positive upswing in mental outlook at the end of this song. Could it be a message that sometimes there are long periods of trial?

**Psalm 102:** This person sings of enduring a prolonged difficulty. He’s stressed out. The days blend without meaning. His bones are said to burn with pain. His appetite is gone due to discouragement, and he’s reduced to skin and bones. Sleep patterns are poor, and he cries often. Yet even he has an unquenchably positive outlook on the future.

**Psalm 119:** The powerful, uplifting message of this song is a favorite of many readers of the Bible, but perhaps they have missed the chronic illness language.

“I am laid low in the dust” (verse 25). “My soul is weary with sorrow” (verse 28). “My comfort in my suffering” (verse 50). “Before I was afflicted” (verse 67). “It was good for me to be afflicted” (verse 71). “My soul faints with longing for your salvation [rescue]” (verse 81). “My eyes fail, looking for your promise. I say, ‘When will you comfort me?’” (verse 82). “I am like a wineskin in

the smoke [shriveled up]" (verse 83). "I have suffered much" (verse 107). "Trouble and distress have come upon me" (verse 143). "I rise before dawn and cry for help" (verse 147). "My eyes stay open through the watches of the night" (verse 148). "Look upon my suffering" (verse 153).

### Forerunner of our Savior

**Psalm 22:** These are the deeply personal thoughts of a physically tormented man. He is sleepless, hopeless, abandoned by friend and family alike. His energy is drained. His joints ache, his courage is melted, and he has generalized pain. He concludes with a positive swing in attitude of mind to a sense of hope. But again, it is in the mind that the hope has come, not the body. While likely reflective of real-life experiences of an earlier servant, this is also a prophecy of the sufferings of the Messiah, which ended in His physical death. We're reminded again of the fact that Christ both suffered and learned from it.

Because of its special significance, I saved Psalm 22 for last. If the perfect Son of God could suffer physically, can there be any argument with the fact that any right-living man or woman may also endure unrelieved pain? Jesus said of Himself that His purpose was to bring relief for those in need of physical health, but also for those in need of spiritual health. Lacking full understanding, many people—even religious ones—assume the two types of relief are equal in importance. That's an incorrect assumption. The supernatural restoration of physical health often served only to demonstrate that it is possible to obtain an infinitely greater treasure, the health of the spirit.

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*We are told in plain language that a right-living man can have many troubles.*

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There is no biblical justification for the idea that all people of faith are quickly relieved of all trouble or suffering. There is a solid promise that God never leaves His people, even if they feel alone, and that they can always find peace of mind or health of the spirit.

### Sick isn't synonymous with sin

Think about the remarkable personal stories of servants of God. We read of people who felt like they needed a safe place to crawl into and hide from overwhelming problems; frustrated, discouraged and depressed people; some who struggled with anger; many who were fatigued and stressed out, with aching bones or joints, and sleepless nights. In short, many servants of God who had chronic illnesses.

Jesus said of Himself, that His purpose was to bring relief for those in need of physical health, but also for those in need of spiritual health.

I hope you are able to draw much encouragement by reading and identifying with these heartrending personal stories of the intimate thoughts, hopes and fears of right-living people with a chronic illness. And I hope that two things are abundantly clear:

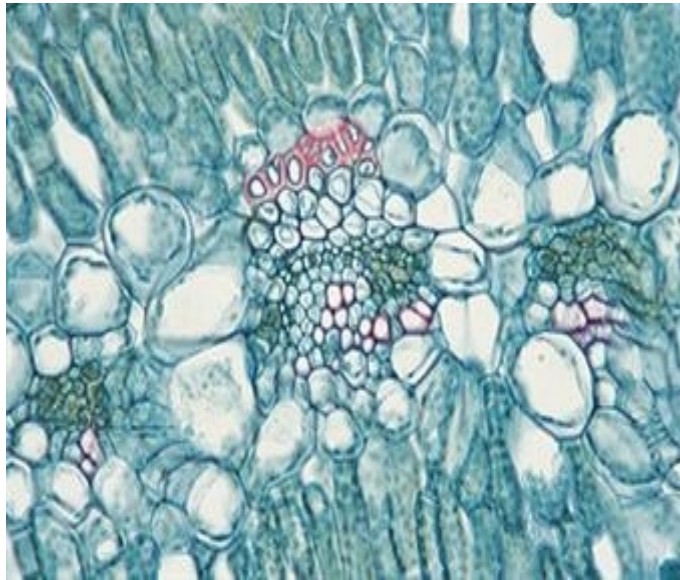
- A person can have a sick body and at the same time be "in good standing" spiritually.
- Regardless of poor health—and maybe even because of poor health—a person can find mental and spiritual health through God.

The life experience of countless Christians, past and present, tells you that it is true.

## The Human Genome Project: Decoding the Mystery of Man

By Howard Davis

*Digging deeply into the mystery of our existence, the Human Genome Project has brilliantly illuminated our knowledge of the mechanics of life—but revealed nothing about our ultimate purpose. To discover mankind's purpose, we must look to another source.*



**R**ARELY DOES SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH spark the excitement of a sporting event. But back in June 2000, the race was on. Scrambling to decode the secrets of human genes, the U.S.-based National Institutes of Health (NIH), the world's largest institution funding medical research, and Celera Genomics Corp., a biotech company, both announced that they had deciphered 85 to 90 percent of the human genome.

Sometimes likened to the race to put a man on the moon, the decade-old Human Genome Project effort to decode our genes was churning out 12,000 letters of genetic code every minute of every day, creating a list that totaled approximately 3 billion when it was finally completed in April 2003.

More than 1,100 biologists, computer scientists and analysts at university laboratories in six countries worked to complete what some are calling biology's version of the Book of Life.

### The glory of your genome

You may have heard much about the human genome in recent years, and there's more to come. But what exactly is the genome, and what does it mean for us?

In elementary school we learn that everything we see is made up of atoms. We learn that atoms combine to make molecules. But we only hazily understand how tiny atoms and molecules come together to make you and me the living creatures we are—filled with the wonder, complexity, potential and choices we live with daily.

How do atoms and molecules work together to create the unique being that is *you*? The search to discover the answer to that question is perhaps the greatest story of sleuthing in science.



All biological life is made up of an astonishingly complex blend of molecules. They combine, break down and recombine into the same or a myriad of other forms of molecules. Continuously, day in and day out, trillions of actions and reactions of molecules occur every second in processes that provide energy, food and cell maintenance for our bodies.

What blueprint, what set of instructions, tells these atoms and molecules what to do? The Human Genome Project aimed to help solve that mystery—and in such breathtaking detail that even the scientific world is awestruck.

The related processes all revolve around molecular structures called chromosomes at the fundamental level of the beginning of life. Chromosomes function in the primary unit of the body, the human cell. In your chromosomes is the genetic document—a chemical instruction set written in chemical code—that tells your body how to arrange, structure, absorb and expel atoms and molecules.

The totality of your genetic instructions is your genome. Each of us has a unique genome, our own chemical genetic instruction set. In one way of looking at it, each human being is a genome.

You received—or became—your genome at conception. The instant your father's sperm with its 23 chromosomes paired with your mother's 23 chromosomes in a fertilized egg, something unique and totally new was created—you!

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*The design of the human cell is brilliant, its performance stunning.*

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You started life as a single cell. From that one cell you virtually exploded into being. Every growth pattern, stage and process of your body occurred like clockwork—from fetal development to birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. For your first 18 years, on average you added 100 million cells to your body *every minute*.

Such dizzying growth is so perfectly programmed from your own set of instructions contained in that first cell that by age 20 you became an adult of more than 100 trillion (100,000,000,000,000) cells—differentiated into heart, spleen, skin, bone, muscle, liver, stomach, eyes, intestines and, most important, brain. Scientists estimate that 40 percent of the genome is devoted to your brain development alone.

How did such astonishing complexity come about?

## Stunning design of DNA, genes, chromosomes

The design of the human cell is brilliant, its performance stunning. The most marvelous biological mystery solved in the last 50 years was the understanding of how genes drive all the developments of the body's cells at the molecular level. To discern the process, scientists had to learn how to analyze the functions of the tiniest cellular structures for feeding, repairing, eliminating waste, dividing and even dying.

As the analytical methods of microbiology became more refined and microscopes ever more powerful, the glory of the structure of chromosomes was revealed.

The key that unlocked the door was understanding DNA—shorthand for deoxyribonucleic acid. Although an acid, DNA is anything but destructive. It is the chemical parent of all the cells of the body and is found in each cell's nucleus (hence it is a nucleic acid), the command center of the cell.

DNA is the epicenter of biotech research because it functions at the heart of all systems of the human body at the molecular level. It is both a substance and an instructional blueprint for every one of the 100 trillion cells making up all body tissue. DNA directs each component of the cell in literally trillions of cellular processes that take place in your body every second of your life.

DNA is structured in a ladderlike formation of two strands with rungs creating a double-helix shape. The ladder forms a continuous, giant molecule called a chromosome. Chromosomes are unlike any other molecules in size and composition.

To better understand these tiny structures, let's compare a chromosome to water. The water molecule has two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom written as H<sub>2</sub>O, with a molecular weight of 18. By comparison, a chromosome molecule has a molecular weight of *80 billion*. For a molecule, a chromosome is incredibly long and narrow. Like an endless and almost impossibly thin thread, it is coiled in the cell's tiny nucleus. With a diameter of 2 nanometers, it is a million times smaller than the distance between the two smallest marks on a ruler. Yet if it were stretched to full length it would be about 1.25 inch long.

DNA's two long intertwined strands appear like stilts made of an alternating phosphate and a sugar. The steplike rungs between the strands are made up of paired bases of nitrogen compounds identified by the letters G, C, A and T (the first letters of the four kinds of bases: guanine, cytosine, adenine and thymine). These are the only substances in DNA, hence the genome consists of only these four—but in seemingly endless sequences.

These compounds tell every cell of your body what to do. They communicate through certain sequences on the genome. Special bands of these compounds are our genes.

Genes are paired on each chromosome with sequences that account for specific traits and physical characteristics. Each body trait requires one or more pairs of genes. Such things as eye color,



shape of body parts and susceptibility to diseases all are found within the gene pairs of the genome. Researchers also are discovering that certain personality dispositions seem to have genetic components (a concept discussed in the Bible several thousand years ago).

There are perhaps 30,000 genes in the human genome. The goal of the Human Genome Project is to decode every one.

### The universe within

Though the smallest unit of the body, cells are no longer the simple structures they once were thought to be. Each cell has many thousands—sometimes hundreds of thousands—of structural components and processes controlled by chromosomes in the nucleus.

Although the universe is thought to have 100 billion galaxies with an estimated 200 billion stars each, some scientists acknowledge that each human body appears as complex and amazingly designed as the universe itself. The human brain has 100 billion neurons, with untold trillions of connections and patterns of endless wiring sequences.

We are unconscious of the incomprehensible complexity of our own creation. We are not aware of what goes on in our cells as our genome tells our cells to assemble amino acids into proteins, proteins to make cell walls, and cell walls to split and divide. We go about our lives unaware of the constant stream of virtual miracles that keep us alive, alert and functioning.

### Missing pieces of the puzzle

How did such an astonishingly complex process begin? How did the billions of atoms in each DNA molecule arrange themselves perfectly for the self-perpetuation we call life?

One of the greatest problems with the science of genetics is that it involves dissecting the fundamental particles of life with no scientific framework for understanding the human genome, where it came from or what its ultimate purpose might be.

Although that framework is available, it won't be found under a microscope or through scientific study. Only one logical explanation exists for the brilliant design of the entire biological life cycle contained in a blueprint of unimaginable complexity. But the explanation isn't the blind, random, mindless chance inherent in the evolutionary perspective held by so many scientists.

How did cells, DNA and chromosomes come about? Perhaps the greatest scientific proof that we were designed by a higher power is this: The process of one genome creating a living, self-perpetuating organism cannot happen over time. It has to be right the first time, and it must entail literally billions of *designed* elements that must be in place and functioning perfectly, or else the cell cannot exist and reproduce. The self-replicating cell exists only because its inherent intelligent systems—each involving billions of functions—interact perfectly. If they don't, it is dead.

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*Scientific  
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The chromosome and cell are so unimaginably complex that they could never have evolved through random processes from nothing, even if given the endless time spans evolutionists require for their theory.

Evolutionists are at a loss to explain, for example, how and why heart tissue, liver tissue, skin and blood are distinctly different and have dramatically different functions. Yet, astonishingly, each cell contains the same DNA. A liver cell's DNA is identical to a brain cell's DNA. How each cell knows its identity, function and position in the body remains a mystery.

### Much more than molecules

Scientific discoveries can be a two-edged sword. They can lead us to marvel at the intricate and perfect design that proves the existence of a much greater intelligence than ourselves, or they can force us to focus so much on the details that we lose sight of the big picture.

Regrettably, the genetic revolution appears to be taking our minds off the bigger picture—the spiritual potential of human existence. We are tempted to obsess on the physical manipulations of genetic engineering as possible solutions to the problems of life and death while overlooking missing pieces of the puzzle that provide true and lasting solutions.



Are you only the sum total of the preprogrammed DNA of your chromosomes? Of course not. Each person is much more than his or her genome. The millions of genes unique to each person are the platform for what the Bible describes as beings *created in the image of God* (Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6).

In this time of dazzling technological progress, the relevance of God and the Bible are critically important tools for cutting through the labyrinth of data and technical jargon. As genetic biologists compile their new blueprint of life, the classic blueprint for life—the Bible—remains ever relevant. Its counsel is timeless—though, to our peril, it is increasingly disregarded. Let's consider.

The Bible goes far beyond the Human Genome Project in describing the nature of the complete human being. It casts light on the greater truths beyond the data of man's genes. In telling us that God created us in His image, it reveals that we have a spiritual heritage far more astounding and compelling than the physical heritage revealed through the Human Genome Project, incredible though it is.

### The genome of God

The central teaching of the Bible is that man exists for an ultimate *spiritual* plan and purpose. Human life is only the physical *means* to this spiritual end, not the end in itself.

God sent Jesus Christ as the manifestation of God's design for man. He revealed the nature of the connection between man and the supernatural realm Jesus called the Kingdom of God. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth...No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:14, 18).

What astonished Jesus' contemporaries—and was rejected by the leadership of the ancient world—was His message that man can enter the divine realm, the Kingdom of God. They rejected that teaching largely because it required a conversion and commitment to God, a repentance from the selfish, greedy, grasping nature in every one of us. In His day, just like today, people didn't want to hear about their ultimate problem and God's solution.

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*The central teaching of the Bible is that man exists for an ultimate spiritual plan and purpose.*

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The heart of our problem is that man must receive a divine nature not to be found in the human genome. It's our only way out of a death trap of man's own making.

Jesus of Nazareth was the perfect, living example of the divine nature. The Bible describes Him as the perfect reflection of God the Father made visible to the world: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being" (Hebrews 1:1-3, New Revised Standard Version).

Jesus said He was the model God sent for a new life: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The world crucified Him. But He then became the pattern of the supernatural resurrection for each of us if we follow Him into the Kingdom of God.

The Bible describes the ultimate purpose of life as entering this Kingdom, another realm of existence. Jesus focused on this theme throughout His ministry (Mark 1:14-15). It remains a message just as relevant as it was 2,000 years ago.

At the heart of the message is the story of a *family*—not the family of man, to which all of us belong courtesy of our amazing genetic heritage, but *the family of God!*

### **God's purpose for us**

The apostle John summarizes God's ultimate purpose for us with these words: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called *children of God!* Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:1-3).

Sadly, even Christianity is in total confusion about His message. You, however, don't need to be.

Just as you can know Jesus Christ's original message, He can become the model for the transformation of your life. He is the standard, the pattern, not just for this physical life, but for the spiritual perfection and immortality God will freely give to those willing to believe Him and take Him up on His offer. He is the bridge between the marvel of the human genome and the far more awesome spiritual genome available to us in the Kingdom of God.

Are you interested in God's genome project? It's in the Bible. And it is good news!

## Recommended reading

Although the Bible reveals our purpose and potential, the purpose for human life has been misinterpreted and misunderstood for thousands of years. Why are we here? You need to read [What Is Your Destiny?](#) to better understand what the Bible teaches.

You also need to understand how human life came about in the first place. Did we evolve, or were we created? Be sure to request [Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?](#) and [Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?](#)

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## The Tiny Pill That Changed the World

By Melvin Rhodes

*Forty-five years ago few could have foreseen how this medical innovation could have so dramatically shaped modern society.*



**I**F YOU WERE ASKED TO NAME which of the technological innovations of the 20th century changed our world the most, what would your answer be?

The automobile? Radio? Television? The Green Revolution? The atomic bomb? Younger people might even say computers or the Internet.

All of these have had an immeasurable influence on our way of life, certainly in the Western world. But one invention is often overlooked, even though it has had a profound effect on our society. Now more than 40 years old, the full consequences of its invention have still not been realized as it takes us further and further into uncharted territory.

The birth-control pill was first given to women in Illinois in the summer of 1960. No one could have foreseen how it would revolutionize the world's morals, change the marriage customs of thousands of years, significantly alter gender roles in Western society and contribute to a major decline in many nations' birth rate.

## Societal changes

The pill didn't start the '60s revolution. Society is constantly changing, perhaps no more so than throughout the 20th century, and the pill was a part of that change. It followed on the heels of other significant developments.

Two world wars had already had a major effect, and the role of women had changed considerably. Forced by the thousands into jobs when the men mobilized for war, women quickly were working more and filling roles normally reserved for men. They had been given the vote. They had more freedom of choice when it came to clothes. Morality was already changing.

Other forms of birth control were already available at that time. Condoms were considered the man's responsibility, but the diaphragm had given women a greater degree of sexual independence ever since a British scientist had invented a spermicide to go with it in 1932.

The pill, however, went much further. Now women were free to have risk-free sex anytime, anywhere, anyplace and with anybody. No longer did women cherish their virginity. Rather, some now boasted to their friends about how many men they'd had. Women were now free to aggressively pursue men.



The pill changed women's attitudes, but it changed men's as well—perhaps even more so.

## Traditions turned upside down

For thousands of years, men had always pursued women in most cultures. Different cultures had developed different rules of courtship, but marriage was a universal custom common to all religions. Before a father would allow his daughter to marry, the prospective husband had to prove he could provide for his new wife and any children they might have. Men were driven to work hard to prepare themselves for marriage and family responsibilities.

The sex drive had always helped motivate men. But before the pill, sex was generally out of the question until marriage. When people risked premarital sex, an unwanted pregnancy and illegitimate child was often the result. With this went a social stigma that could last a lifetime. Girls were particularly afraid that the father would run away from his responsibilities, greatly jeopardizing their future marital prospects. Thus elaborate courtship rules were observed to handle the difficult transition toward marriage.

The pill changed everything. Now men and women could have sex without responsibility. Fear of the consequences began to quickly disappear.



The kind of hedonistic society the apostle Paul predicted would prevail “in the last days” quickly became a reality. He warned that “people will be lovers of themselves,” no longer needing a stable, loving relationship. They would be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4, New International Version).

Paul goes on to describe a society obsessed with sexual pleasures: “They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires” (verse 6).

### Other serious consequences remain

Although the pill removed some of the most obvious unintended outcomes of premarital sex—unwanted pregnancies—many other far-reaching consequences remain.

While the birth-control pill prevented countless pregnancies, the number of unwanted teen pregnancies has continued to climb. Both the number and percentage of illegitimate teen births are far higher now than before the pill was introduced. Teenagers are far more sexually active, and at far younger ages.

Many people remain woefully ignorant of the dangers and spread of sexually transmissible diseases (STDs), currently afflicting an estimated 25 percent of American youths. Sex now can even prove deadly—the HIV virus that leads to AIDS is increasingly common among heterosexuals in the West and is devastating whole nations in Africa.

It takes time for people’s perceptions to change.

*The pill changed everything. Now men and women could have sex without responsibility.*

After the introduction of the pill, the ’60s revolution transformed many Western societies. One after another, nations in the West liberalized their moral laws, the fear of the negative consequences largely removed by the birth-control pill. The result? The *destruction of the traditional family* with consequences that are *continuing to mount*.

The entertainment industry—television, movies and music—is enormously influential in breaking down values and taboos, in portraying illicit sexual bliss without consequences and promoting alternative lifestyles to replace the traditional family.

The media has not adapted to the present-day realities of sexually transmissible diseases such as AIDS or the emotional consequences of the kind of wholesale immorality they advocate. Not surprisingly, nor have people who are inordinately influenced by the entertainment rather than by God’s Word, the Bible.

### Biblical instruction about sexual relationships

The ancient Greek city of Corinth, a major port in apostolic times, was similar to many of our Western cities today. The people were cosmopolitan, sophisticated and showed little restraint in sexual matters. The apostle Paul, well aware of their overall attitude, wrote the following in his first epistle to the church there: “*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body*” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Sexual sins, said Paul, were different from other sins such as lying and stealing or even murder. Sexual sin, in particular, *harms oneself*. He was not referring simply to venereal disease, which is always a threat when sexual relations take place outside of a faithful marital relationship. Paul was also warning of the *damage to the mind*.

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*Many people remain woefully ignorant of the dangers and spread of sexually transmissible diseases.*

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God intended that a man and a woman should marry. “It is not good that man should be alone... Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:18, 24). God intended that marriage be for life, a lifelong and loving relationship. Jesus made it clear that changing partners was never part of God’s plan (Matthew 19:8).

Traditionally a man had to work for his wife. Even today, in some cultures men have to pay a dowry to the family of their intended bride. In other cultures it is sometimes the other way around, where a woman’s family must provide a dowry to the husband-to-be. Either practice illustrates the fact that in marriage two people are coming together here to form one economic unit. Both should contribute to the financial stability of the marriage.

Waiting and planning were very much a part of marriage customs. In designing human beings, God in His wisdom ensured that a child did not follow until nine months after the marriage, again giving parents time to prepare and to adjust to each other.

### **Sound reasons for cultural taboos**

In many cultures members of the opposite sex cannot be alone together until their wedding night. Even in the West chaperones were common until fairly recently. Their responsibility was to watch over the young couple and ensure that there was no sexual contact. People understood the value of keeping young men and women pure until marriage.

Why was this so important?

There were many factors. It was partly to protect reputations. It also ensured that the parentage of any offspring could not be in doubt—which in turn could affect the inheritance of property in later years. Another factor was that sex outside of marriage would limit marital prospects later.

But most important, many people recognized that extramarital sex was sinful and against the will of God. They also understood that avoiding sexual conduct until marriage was one of the best ways in which parents could contribute to the future happiness and well-being of their children.

Sex is powerful. The first sexual experience is intended to bond a couple together. Yet all too often the pill has ensured that it drives people apart.

*In the age of the pill, often the first sexual experience is with a casual acquaintance—as are many subsequent sexual relationships.*

In the age of the pill, often the first sexual experience is with a casual acquaintance—as are many subsequent sexual relationships. Sometimes feelings are damaged, sometimes no feeling is evident at all. Either way the prospect of a future long-lasting, loving relationship, which God intended as a gift to men and women, is made much more difficult.

Sexual relationships devoid of love can lead to an obsession with searching for pleasurable sex. But unrealistic expectations guarantee frustration and disappointment, and no illicit relationship is ever truly satisfying.

A promiscuous life of multiple sex partners forms a bad habit, much the same as smoking cigarettes or using illegal drugs. Such habits can easily become addictive. Should such a person later marry, he or she will likely find the marriage wanting, lacking the excitement of the chase, leading eventually to a return to immorality and a failed marriage.

### What does God say?

Many people have bought into the notion that the pill has changed all the old laws and customs relating to marriage, sex and the family. But this is not the case. God's laws were given for a purpose and are intended for all people for all time.

No matter what inventions come along, God instructs all people everywhere—especially Christians—to conduct themselves in a chaste, respectful and respectable manner. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:3 that “among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people” (NIV).

*Sexual relationships devoid of love can lead to an obsession with searching for pleasurable sex.*

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 he adds, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality” (NIV).

In Proverbs 6:27 King Solomon of Israel was inspired to write: “Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared?” He recognized that there are negative consequences for wrong actions.

In Proverbs 5 he urges others not to make the same mistakes, not to succumb to the temptation of immorality: “For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave” (verses 3-5, NIV).

In verse 15 he adds, “Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well,” advising one to be faithful to his marriage partner if he desires true happiness.

The pill has altered the age in which we live. Immorality has always been with us, but this is the first time in history in which people have been able to so rampantly indulge in sexual liaisons without fear of consequences and with no sense of responsibility.

Within a loving marriage, birth-control methods can help a husband and wife plan their family in a responsible manner. But used outside of marriage, the pill opens up a world of immoral sexual opportunities that are ungodly, harmful and ultimately self-destructive.

We should heed the instruction given in the Bible by a loving God who wants those who follow Him to have loving, faithful and committed marriages.

### **Recommended reading**

What is the purpose of the laws and principles laid out in the Bible? Are they simply restrictions on our fun, keeping us from enjoying a good time? Are they hopelessly outdated in today's world? Few people really understand why God gave the instructions He did. Be sure to download or request printed copies of our free eye-opening booklets [Making Life Work](#) and [The Ten Commandments](#).

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## **Letters to the Editor**

### **"Building a Solid Foundation"**



My congratulations and my thanks to Mrs. Jantzen for an outstanding article on child rearing, chock-full of practical and wise advice. You can't beat the combination of experience and research she evidences in the article! While many people have rich life experiences, few have analyzed them as fully, and fewer still could distill them into good writing. I would add one thought only—that today's world has added an abundance of electronic distractions in addition to television—Play Station, iPods, text messaging, instant messaging, etc.—and I think that a wise parent needs to supervise and limit these along with TV.

— Cecil Maranville

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity