

# Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

*“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”—Philippians 4:6*

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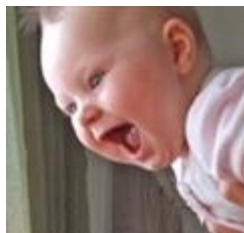


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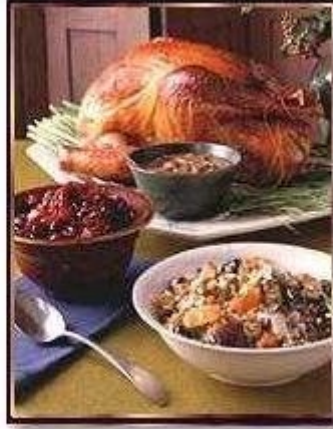
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## Thoughts for Thanksgiving

By Joel Meeker

*A Thanksgiving Day in Thailand opened my eyes to things I'd taken for granted*



**T**HE FIRST THANKSGIVING DAY I SPENT OUTSIDE the United States was quite an experience. I had just turned 20, and was working as a teacher in a refugee camp in the golden triangle region of northern Thailand.

We were doing our best to prepare Laotian refugees, who had fled the communist regime in their country, for the move to the host countries who had agreed to take them in: Australia, Canada, France or the United States. We taught them English or French, and the rudiments of Western culture they would need to get along in their new homes.

### Strangers in a strange land

It was a challenge. Though my students took their studies seriously and applied themselves, some of the concepts we needed to teach them were difficult to convey. How do you explain all the comforts and complexities of life in a Western metropolis (many of my students were to go to Los Angeles)—things like supermarkets, shopping malls and superhighways—to people who have lived all their lives in remote and sometimes rather primitive villages? Many of my students came from families who practiced slash-and-burn farming. They lived in bamboo houses with dirt floors.

While I was doing my best to teach my students about the West, I was also learning from them, as well as from the whole experience of living without running water and electricity. It was my initiation to life in what we now optimistically call “developing” countries. As my students described their former lives to me, the gritty reality of how life is for the majority of the world’s population struck home hard.

I learned about the shorter life expectancy people have in such countries; 55 or 60 was very old for them. I saw how much more frequently they were ill, often with diseases we no longer worry about in the West. I discovered how much more difficult it is to earn one’s daily bread, and how long hours of backbreaking labor, day in and day out, may not guarantee subsistence to a family.

And I saw the suffering of the refugee: family members separated and lost during their escape or killed by pursuers. There is the loss and disorientation that comes from having to flee one's home and country with only such items as can be carried by hand. Some reported having been the victims of chemical weapon attacks.



## A Thai Thanksgiving

It was in this context that in mid-November, my friend Dave and I, who were the only two English teachers at the Chiang Kham refugee camp, received an invitation for Thanksgiving dinner. An American lady working on a local mission had invited the various aid workers and missionaries in the area. We were a group of 10 all together, including an Italian doctor, a Swiss dentist and his wife and an aid worker from somewhere down under.

We were thrilled to receive the invitation because Dave and I thought we were going to have a bowl of rice with a bit of tough water buffalo meat in hot sauce for our Thanksgiving dinner, like we had at most other meals. But our hostess had somehow managed to find a plump turkey, not a common item in northern Thailand. She made stuffing and gravy. There were mashed potatoes. She prepared a sauce out of a local fruit that tasted very close to cranberry, and had even made pie out of a local squash that tasted just like pumpkin.

Our hostess asked a Mr. Calloway, a missionary who had lived in Asia for over 30 years, to ask the blessing before the meal. I wholeheartedly said "amen" to the thanks he offered for all the blessings received. During the meal the Americans present answered questions from the others about the history and meaning of the holiday.

Listening to the others and giving some of the answers myself started me reflecting on Thanksgiving Day, and how easy it is for the "thanks" part to fall out of the celebration of this American and Canadian holiday. I was more thankful for that meal in Chiang Kham than I ever had been during Thanksgiving as a child.

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*Dave and I thought we were going to have a bowl of rice with a bit of tough water buffalo meat in hot sauce...*

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Not that I hadn't been thankful before. My parents had taken Thanksgiving Day pretty seriously as a day of giving thanks to the Creator for our blessings. It's just that I hadn't really realized how many blessings I had, until I could compare with people who'd never had most of them.

It had never occurred to me that our regular Thanksgiving meal each year would represent a "never in a lifetime" experience to a big part of the world's population. "Familiarity breeds contempt," goes the old saw. I suspect that is true of blessings. Those we've always had, be they some of the most precious, can easily be taken for granted. And they often are.

## A short list of blessings

Since that Thanksgiving Day spent in the golden triangle, I've visited and sometimes worked in other "developing countries" in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. I'd like to share a short list of blessings I took for granted before those travels. Perhaps there are some here that you take for granted as well. These are written from an American point of view, but they are generally true for all the nations that make up what we call the West.

I never miss a meal unless I choose to. Like many Americans, I worry more about eating too much than not eating enough. Most people in the world don't eat their fill every day. According to a World Health Organization report, 32 percent of children under age 5 in developing countries will have their growth stunted by malnutrition.

I have a generous life expectancy. As of 2007, a child born in Haiti has a life expectancy of 57 years. A baby born in Bangladesh has a life expectancy of 63 years. A Rwandan child will live, on average, to be only 49. This means I'll have 15 to 30 extra years to live compared to many of my counterparts in the world. Barring something very unusual, I'll get to watch my children grow all the way up, and have a good chance of meeting my grandchildren, and even of watching them grow up.



My family receives excellent medical care. This is not something to be taken for granted. Though I may sometimes complain about the cost of medical coverage, and the difficulties of getting insurance, my family has access to some of the best medical care in the world. Much of the world has only the most rudimentary of care. Over 10 percent of the children born in Pakistan will die before age 5. The figure reaches a shattering 24 percent of the children born in Afghanistan.

My children receive free public education. While our public education system has its problems, even with its flaws we can be thankful for it. I have friends in some African countries who can't afford to send all their children to school. At a cost of about \$50 per year, per student, they must choose which of their children they will send, when they can find the money to send any of them. Since most of the people are unemployed, and there is no social security system, they have no guaranteed income. This makes going to school a precarious proposition for most children there.

I can count on the free and fair election of the nation's leaders. Most of the countries in the world claim to be democratic, but for many of them this is true in name only. I may not agree with our leaders on everything (I don't), and I may even worry about the fitness of some of them to govern (I do), but I don't have to seriously worry about them fixing elections or staging a military coup d'etat and refusing to leave office. Many countries in Asia and South America, and almost all countries in Africa, live in perpetual fear of just such things. In some regions of the world, domination by the strongest and most ruthless is just standard operating procedure.

By hard work I can advance in the career of my choice. The United States has been called the "land of opportunity." I believe it. I've met many very intelligent, capable people in Europe, not to mention Asia and Africa, who have a good education—sometimes graduate degrees—job experience and the willingness to work hard, but who are unemployed or underemployed or in dead-end jobs because the economic situation in their country stifles advancement.

You may remember the old joke about the toy to help children learn about life: no matter how you put it together, it doesn't work. That joke is economic reality in much of the world. People with equivalent education levels and experience may have one tenth or less of our purchasing power. If the average American so chooses, he can go back to school (while keeping his current job) and change careers to one he thinks he'll enjoy more. We can advance as far as our ability and drive will take us. That's a luxury most people in the world don't have.

## The fruits of unthankfulness

In the New Testament, when Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, he gave a description of how the world came to be in such a discouraging state. Verses 21 and 22 of chapter 1 say of humanity in general, “Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.” I find that passage striking. It says that not being thankful to God changes the way we think—and for the worse. It darkens our hearts. It takes away from our happiness and our mental and emotional well-being.

Could that loss of mental balance be the reason for some of the worsening conditions in the world? We like to think we’re becoming more “wise,” but there are many situations out there in the world that look pretty “foolish”—problems large and small that don’t get solved because of the way people are thinking about them.

What about problems in our individual lives? Could some of our personal problems be caused by a lack of gratitude? Maybe we should try something as simple as being more thankful. Paul apparently felt it would help us get our thinking straight.

The blessings I mentioned above are not things I’ve earned. I just happen to have been born in the United States. In my experience, we Americans are not smarter than other peoples, but in many, many ways we are more blessed. Yes, we work hard, but others in the world work as hard or harder with much less to show for it.

We are like children growing up in a wealthy family. Because we’ve always had certain blessings, we can easily take them for granted. We may even spend more time complaining about what we wish we had, than being thankful for what we already have. Someone once said: “He who is not grateful for the good things he has, would not be happy with what he wishes he had.” That’s something to think about.

Consider also that physical riches are not the most important ones. God strongly warns those who are rich materially to examine soberly their spiritual condition and repent (Revelation 3:17-19; James 5:1-5; Matthew 6:19-34). Many of the physically poor Christians I’ve visited display spiritual riches of faith and character that we in wealthy nations would do well to learn from.

The national forefathers who started the tradition of declaring days of thanksgiving, from William Bradford in 1621 to George Washington in 1789 to Abraham Lincoln in 1863, did so because they sincerely believed the Power on high to be responsible for the emerging nation’s blessings. But we’ve become a more “enlightened” country now—or have we? I wonder how thankful we will be not only on this Thanksgiving Day, but also through the rest of the year. After all, we never stop being blessed.




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*Could some of our personal problems be caused by a lack of gratitude? Maybe we should try something as simple as being more thankful. Paul apparently felt it would help us get our thinking straight.*

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## Recommended reading

The blessings God provides go far beyond the physical things we can enjoy. The destiny God has in store for all human beings is incredible! For more about this most-important subject, download or order a free copy of the booklet [What Is Your Destiny?](#) It can take your thankfulness to a higher level.

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## The Power of Prayer: Stolen Passport Found Just in Time!

By Claire Gordon

*A young adult in South Africa experiences God's special intervention.*



**S**OMETIMES WE HAVE SUCH DIRECT INTERVENTION by God, it brings home how personally God is involved in each of our lives—not only in the spiritual aspects, but also in our daily physical needs. Such a direct intervention happened a few months ago to Ron Lange, who attends the United Church of God congregation in Cape Town, South Africa.

### The door was ajar

After the men's leadership training session after church services, Ron offered to give Gareth Gordon a lift home. As Gareth and Ron approached the car, Gareth noticed that the passenger door was not closed completely. He asked Ron if he forgot to close the door, but Ron was adamant that he had checked all the doors when he locked the car.

This led them to carefully examine the car, which they might not have done otherwise, as it was dusk by this time. Upon closer examination it became clear that criminals had broken into the car. They must have had good knowledge of the make of car, because they had cleverly detached the alarm from the hooter (horn) and then opened the doors without much visible damage.

Luckily Ron had a gear-lock installed, so they were unable to steal the car. However they searched the car for valuables and found Ron's filofax, which he had tucked under his seat. Ron didn't normally bring the filofax with him, but that day was an exception. Unfortunately, the filofax contained Ron's contacts, appointments and other information he needed, as well as his passport, driver's license, some money and most of his bank and credit cards.



All of these things can be replaced, albeit at an inconvenience, but the problem was that Ron was due to fly to Hong Kong early the following morning.

*Ron had no idea what he was going to do about his flight. It was a nonrefundable ticket, and the ticket cost was not covered by insurance.*

Ron and Gareth canvassed the area surrounding the hall—in case the thieves had thrown something away for which they had no interest—but they didn't find anything helpful. They then went to the police to report the break-in and to get a case number. The police came to the scene, but there was not much they could do. Then Gareth and Ron drove home and started canceling all the bank and credit cards.

Ron had no idea what he was going to do about his flight. It was a nonrefundable ticket, and the ticket cost was not covered by insurance.

There was no way to get an emergency passport in a few hours, let alone on a Sunday. The Hong Kong trip was to replenish stock for his business, and without the stock, he could not trade and make a living. He was also meeting up with someone else in Hong Kong who was relying quite heavily on his assistance there.

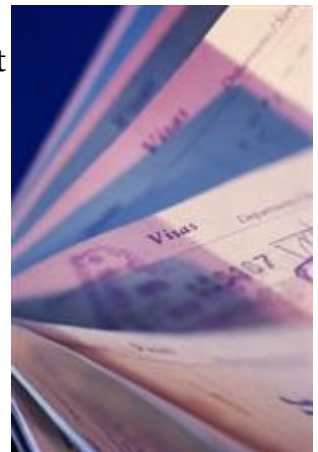
### The power of prayer

After canceling his cards, Ron, as well as others who had been notified about the problem, began to pray. As Jesus Christ said, "Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22).

While Ron was praying, his phone rang. It was a woman in Parow (about 10 to 15 kilometers or 6 to 9 miles from the robbery). She had been driving and had spotted something lying in a gutter. She stopped her car and got out (in the rain!) to see what it was. She had found Ron's filofax. And the passport was still inside! It is a miracle the thieves did not keep the passport to sell.

When the woman returned home, she went through considerable trouble to find Ron's telephone number, including phoning his parents in East London and various other client contact numbers he had written in his filofax.

Ron was able to go and fetch his filofax immediately that evening. The passport was undamaged and Ron could make his flight, as well as getting back his valuable client contact lists.





Ron was able to transfer his travel money into the one last credit card that he had left at home and could proceed with his trip as planned.

While Ron was at the airport, waiting for his flight, he had another surprise. A man phoned to say he found Ron's driver's license, in a different location to the filofax, while he was out cycling. He had noticed something glinting on the ground and had stopped and picked up the license.

It seems as though the thieves were looking through the filofax while driving and had thrown items out of the window as they went along. By God's intervention, Ron was able to recover most of his things and only needed to reissue his bank and credit cards.

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*“Whatever things  
you ask in prayer,  
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This is an inspiring story of how God sees what happens to us on a daily basis. He is actively watching us and has the ability to step in and rectify a seemingly impossible situation. Thanks to God for His interventions—those we find out about and those we don't even realize have happened.

### **Recommended reading**

For more about answered prayer, see these articles online: [“The Privilege and Power of Prayer”](#) and [“The Other Prayer List”](#).

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## Searching, Thirsting, Wishing

By Stuart Segall

*If only we could be millionaires, all of our problems would be gone! Or would they? All of us have deep needs we seek to satisfy. But most of the things we try don't really work. What can fill your yearning?*



**S**OME TIME IN OUR LIVES—maybe today—we find ourselves searching, thirsting, wishing and looking for the “right stuff.” We yearn for the stuff that will fill the hole in our hearts and our lives.

Jesus knew all about that yearning. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled,” He promised (Matthew 5:6). But for most people, that seems a bit ethereal. In the real world, how can you take that to the bank?

### ***The Millionaire***

As a kid, I remember an old late '50s show called something like *The Millionaire*. As a boy, I would drop my toys and anything else, and slide into “home plate” in front of the small black-and-white TV just in time to watch this show. Each episode, a person in a bind would receive a million dollars from an anonymous donor, and this was the gateway to a chance at real happiness. (Remember, when I was a boy, a million was worth many, many times more than today.)

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*Have you ever daydreamed about what it would be like to actually win the lottery, to suddenly become a megamillionaire?*

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Sounds like today and the modern mega lottery winners! But if you caught the recent TV show that interviewed many of the big winners, you heard that even these winners said that money

couldn't buy them happiness. Oh, baby, it could buy them many *things*, but soon the emptiness came back.

Have you ever daydreamed about what it would be like to actually win the lottery, to suddenly become a megamillionaire? When you fantasize about something, whether it's your dream job, getting the girl or guy or that ideal car or home, the dream is usually better than the way it turns out in real life. As those lottery winners discovered, when your dream comes true, it's generally not as exciting as you thought it would be.

### The woman at the well

The desire for real fulfillment in life knows no national boundaries. While traveling through Samaria, Jesus met a woman who was searching and thirsting without really knowing what she was looking for. He promised her "water" that would truly quench her spiritual thirst and lead to eternal life (John 4:13-14)!

Like the woman Jesus met at the well in Samaria, we are looking for someone or something to meet the deepest needs of our lives. We are on a search for fulfillment. But there is simply no person and no thing on this earth that will meet our deepest need. We truly can be like the old song, "Looking for love [or fulfillment or significance] in all the wrong places."

You see, one of the reasons we keep coming up empty, one of the reasons these things don't satisfy, is that we were created to know God. God put a hole in each one of us, and only God can fill a God-made hole. We were created to have a relationship with the One who made us. Therefore, all these other things sparkle and shine and seem to be magical, but they are just cheap substitutes. They will never measure up.

God Himself will get to the heart of your problems. God Himself will fill that void in your life. Look for love in the right place—the real jackpot—and let God fill the hole in your heart. You will be glad you did.

### Recommended reading

Our hearts were made incomplete, but God has mapped out the transformation we need to make to achieve true fulfillment. Download or order your free copy of [Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion](#). It gives the biblical road map to fulfilling our incredible human potential.



## Light the Candle!

By Robert Berendt

*In a world of darkness, we need to come to the light to become lights ourselves.*



**A**N OLD SAYING GOES something like this: “It’s better to light a candle than curse the darkness.”

When I was a little boy, we sang a children’s song at church that had a similar message. It was a very long time ago, but some of the words were: “Jesus bids us shine with a perfect light, like a little candle glowing in the night, in this world of darkness, we must shine, you in your small corner and I in mine.” I may have missed a word or two, but the message was perfectly clear.

### A dark and discouraging world

There are enough troubles in life for each of us to give in to discouragement and follow the cycle into depression. If we focus our thoughts and attention on the troubles that assail us, the mistakes we may have made or the hurts and pains we have suffered, we will surely find ourselves “cursing the darkness.”

The book of Job includes examples of cursing the darkness. Job had enough problems to warrant a full-blown depression. He came to the point where he did not want to live (Job 14:13). Added to his weighty difficulties was the poor counsel and “help” of his friends. His friends did not light a candle for Job—they focused on the darkness.



In all of our lives there will be times for tears to flow and for anguish to squeeze our hearts. The death of a loved one, the troubles of our children or the suffering of this world give us enough darkness that we can become cynical and bitter. That outcome, though, is a result of focusing on the darkness and not lighting the candle.

Isaiah wrote about the condition people find themselves in when they are far from their Creator and Heavenly Father. He states that our iniquities (errors and sins) have separated us from God (Isaiah 59:2). He explains that we look for light, but there is darkness, and we grope for the wall like the blind—as if we had no eyes (verses 9-10).

## A great light

God does not leave us to stumble in the dark. He has sent a great light. That light, though, does not penetrate our minds and thoughts regardless of what we do. It requires our efforts to find it and to believe in it.

Isaiah put it this way (with God's inspiration): "Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isaiah 60:1-3).

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*God does not leave us to stumble in the dark. He has sent a great light... It requires our efforts to find it and to believe in it.*

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There is only one true light—everything else is darkness. Jesus Christ is that great light (John 1:4-9).

There is a caution to those who strive to follow Jesus Christ. Luke 11:35 admonishes us to take heed that the light that is in us is not darkness. Some think they have found light but are deceived—and that leads only to further darkness. Followers of God wrestle with the rulers of darkness, writes Paul (Ephesians 6:12-13). They are to take up the whole armor of God against this enemy.

Jesus explained that He was the light and that this light would come to all who earnestly seek God (Luke 11:33-36). The sad tale about mankind is that we have loved darkness rather than light (John 3:19). Jesus Christ was rejected, mocked, cruelly beaten and put to death. His light was bright and more powerful than anything we can imagine. He was far too bright for this world to enjoy, because He revealed their evil deeds.

## Coming out of darkness

What about you and what about me? Coming out of this world of darkness is a little like coming out of a very dark room into a very bright light—it takes time for your eyesight to adjust and for you to notice the things about you. We stumble about as our eyes adjust to light.

The questions we all need to ask are: How do we go about allowing the light from God to enter our minds, and how do we pass that on to others? The task seems huge and daunting—and our normal reaction is to be overcome with the enormity of what we need to do and to lapse back into the state we were in.

Jesus explained that most people have closed their eyes to God's truth (Matthew 13:15). We do that willingly and easily when we ought to resist the natural reaction. We need to learn to be far more aggressive against darkness and act.

How then do we receive and use this marvelous light? Everything we do in life seems to be a process that takes time and effort. It's like learning to walk. It starts off in small stages.



A friend and I were out in the woods for a few days. When we wanted to start a fire, we had to first light a small match and nurse the little flame into something that grew until we finally had a larger usable fire. If the firewood was wet or the matches damp, more effort was needed. We found that we also had to tend the fire. We added small pieces of wood to encourage a larger and larger flame and did not put a log on until we were sure the fire would burn.

Darkness will not totally vanish until Jesus Christ returns to this earth and establishes the government of God here on earth. That is a government of light, and all darkness will be banished.

When we reflect the light of Christ, we will strive to make a difference now, by helping those in need. We'll follow the example of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). We'll help feed the hungry and visit the sick and comfort the oppressed (Matthew 25:34-40).

God gives us the candle and the matches. He gives us instructions and also further material to burn. We need to be careful that the match is not blown out by a breath of air. We realize that sin has cut us off from God and led us into darkness. Repentance that God grants is the match and as Jesus Christ dwells in us through the Holy Spirit, the material that burns brightly is present. The light is the hope in Christ that offers eternal life wrapped in joy, peace and productivity forever.

In time, there will be no darkness—only light. In each of us, all the dark shadows and corners will have been brightly lit. Believe it, but do not despise the little things we can do today. Be a little light in your corner now. Light the candle. This world of darkness needs even the smallest flame.

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*Coming out of this world of darkness is a little like coming out of a very dark room into a very bright light—it takes time for your eyesight to adjust and for you to notice the things about you.*

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### Recommended reading

Jesus Christ brought a message of hope and light—the good news—the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Are you being called to live that message and spread the light now? Download or request a free copy of [The Gospel of the Kingdom](#) to discover more about this brilliant biblical truth!

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## Blessed Are Your Eyes

By Andy McClain

*We greatly prize the amazing sense of physical sight. But the ability to see spiritually is even more miraculous!*



**W**E USE OUR EYES in almost every activity we perform: reading, working, writing, driving and countless other ways. Our eyes allow us to see and interpret shapes, colors and dimensions in our world. Most people would probably agree that sight is the sense that they value the most.

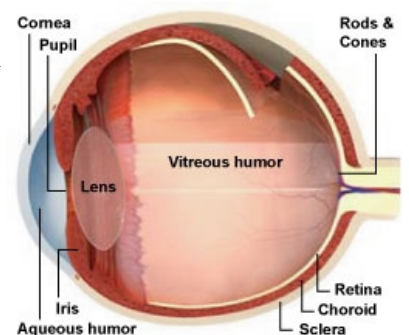
There is another kind of “sight” we have when we understand God’s truth, and it should be at least as valuable to us as our physical eyesight. By looking at the amazing way the components work together to produce physical eyesight, we can understand more about our spiritual eyesight.

### The complexity of vision

The process that creates our vision is very complex, and yet we rarely think about it in the morning when we first open our eyes. Light waves from an object enter the eye through the clear cornea and then through the pupil. The cornea converges the light waves and produces an inverted (upside down) image just behind the lens.

This image is sent through the vitreous humor and back to the retina at the rear of our eye. In the retina, light impulses are changed into electrical signals that are sent along the optic nerve to the brain, which combines and then interprets all these electrical signals as real-time visual images.

One thing that makes vision so amazing is that we do not actually “see” with our eyes, but rather with our brains. Our eyes are merely the beginning of the visual process. It is the combination of the eye and brain that translates light waves into the sensation we call sight.



Seeing physically involves much more than just opening our eyes and looking around. Two key things must be present—light and the ability to translate that light into something comprehensible. When we apply this to our spiritual eyesight, a connection is obvious. We also need these two things to “see” spiritually.

## Seeing spiritually

First, we must have the light of God’s truth. Solomon wrote, “For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light” (Proverbs 6:23). Similarly the Psalms tell us, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). When Jesus Christ spoke about God’s way, He said, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).

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*One thing that makes vision so amazing is that we do not actually “see” with our eyes, but rather with our brains.*

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When God shines the light of His truth into our lives through His calling, it is just the beginning of our “seeing” process. Next, God’s Spirit must work with our minds to begin to help us understand His Word. Without this step, the “light” is meaningless. The Holy Spirit is much like our physical retina that translates light into electrical signals that the brain can interpret. God’s Spirit provides the interpretation or translation that allows us to understand and “see” spiritual truths. God calls us, opens our minds and then gives us understanding (John 6:44; 1 John 5:20; Ephesians 1:15-18).

## Myopia, hyperopia and blindness

For physical sight, 20/20 vision is the goal. That is the ability to see a certain size object at the distance of 20 feet. Many people, however, do not have this precise vision. Two of the most common reasons are myopia (nearsightedness) or hyperopia (farsightedness). In both cases, the eye is unable to focus the light properly, so vision becomes blurry—either for near objects or those far away.



We can also become spiritually nearsighted or farsighted if we are not careful. Life’s activities can easily cause us to focus on unimportant things, blurring our spiritual vision.

The apostle Peter warned against spiritual nearsightedness in 2 Peter 1:8-9: “For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.” Verses 5 through 7 give a list of godly characteristics that will help prevent spiritual nearsightedness: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.

Without clear vision, we can begin to drift from the “straight and narrow path” that God tells us we must follow as Christians. We must work to keep our “vision” sharp through continual prayer, Bible study and fasting.



Unfortunately, some people are physically blind. Legal blindness is usually defined as visual acuity less than 20/200 with corrective lenses. There are many causes of physical blindness, but the result is the same—the inability to see.

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*We can also become spiritually nearsighted or farsighted if we are not careful. Life's activities can easily cause us to focus on unimportant things, blurring our spiritual vision.*

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Most of society today is spiritually blind. They cannot understand the truths of God that may seem so plainly visible to those God has called now. Paul also tells the reason for this blindness when he says, “If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). God currently is allowing this blindness.

Physical eyesight is an incredible gift. Being able to see the rich colors and diversity of objects in our world cannot be equaled by any of the other senses. Spiritual eyesight is an even greater gift. It allows us to “see” those things that cannot be equaled by anything in this physical world.

We should never take understanding God’s truth for granted. “But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Matthew 13:16-17).

### **Recommended reading**

For more about how God’s calling opens our eyes and transforms us, see the article [“The Beautiful Process of Becoming a Saint”](#).

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## “I Love You!”

By Joy Porter

*God is writing His love letters to us with everything that grows and everything that flows, astounds and towers over us in nature. And what can be more precious than a baby!*



**I**'M SITTING ON MY COUCH, watching my baby daughter play with her toys. She is voraciously chewing on toy after toy, all of six months old. She notices my glance and flashes me a huge grin before grabbing a toy baby doll and staring at its face with delight.

As I listen to her squeals, I am sometimes overcome by what she means, what her presence tells me about God. She is here by His design. She is a tiny yet intensely moving message from Him. My husband and I have watched her transformation from a very tiny and very helpless newborn to a wiggly, squealing, giggle ball. She is just so much fun, and we are constantly overcome by her beauty.

What does she tell me about God? God loves to create beauty. He loves to give us good gifts. She is a gift from Him, practically wrapped up in a big bow, just waiting for us! When God gave her to us, He was saying, “I love you so much I want to give you something beautiful to care for and love.”



And isn't that what God is trying to show us in everything that He has made? The world in its expansive beauty. The warmth and life we can receive from healthy and pure relationships with our families and God's people. Mountains, trees, oceans and backyard gardens.

God is writing His love letters to us with everything that grows and everything that flows, astounds and towers over us in nature. He is, in essence, sending us flowers, chocolates and poetry in the everyday pleasures of healthy family life: hugs, kisses and family devotion.

It seems to me that God is a romantic. What beautiful gifts He showers us with! Christ is to be our bridegroom, after all. It is only fitting that He should love us so and create a world of beauty for us to enjoy.

Our new baby is a pinnacle of the beauty I have been blessed to behold in my life. She has opened my heart to a new level of worship for our great beauty-bestowing God. God's message to us in the world He has made is so clear when we choose to listen: "I love you, I love you, I love you!"

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*When God gave her to us, He was saying, "I love you so much I want to give you something beautiful to care for and love."*

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### Recommended reading

God intended marriage and family to be among the highest joys of human life, but they are under attack in the modern world. What steps can we take to enjoy the universal dream of a happy, successful marriage and family? Download or request your free copy of [Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension](#).

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## Letters to the Editor

### Feasting With a Focus



I have for a long time now studied using the updates and Web site of the United Church of God. I find your teaching very close to the Bible—what I call The Handbook for Life.

However, as a well-respected research scientist of some 50 years' experience, I feel it is only in the last six or seven years that I have come to understand more closely what God requires of us compared with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist, Anglican and so-called Free Churches.

But from what I can see, all churches in autumn, or the fall as it is known in the United States, praise and thank God for all His blessings of the harvest, meaning food or farm produce. This is correct to do, but God's gifts to us extend far beyond that. God gave some of us abilities to be good farmers and fishermen, but it seems to be forgotten that God's gifts extended to giving some people the abilities to be creators and developers of great medicines, such as Alexander Fleming and penicillin. Others like myself were given the ability to develop engineering products and others entertainment products and computers, etc. These abilities are gifts given to us by God and should be used to benefit mankind. The products from their works should equally be included in our thanks to God for His harvest just as the farm products are. They are all part of the harvest we give thanks for around this time of year. Please let us all include in our harvest thanksgiving all that God has given us.

I could never have invented many of the things I have without the gifts and abilities God gave me.

Many thanks for all the good work you do. Your brother in Christ,

— J. Ingram, United Kingdom

*Thank you so much for your letter. We appreciate your feedback and your interest in our articles.*

*I must say that there is no argument with your statement that “abilities are gifts given to us by God.” We could not agree more.*

*As the author, Mr. Wasilkoff, said, “The physical harvest serves to remind us of the spiritual blessings we enjoy.” The Bible often refers to the harvest and the fruits of our labors, but those fruits would apply to any profession, not just farming. Although those of us who are not farmers do not bring in crops, we bring in paychecks, profits, etc. We contribute in various ways to society. These, too, are the fruits of labor.*

*We also remember that Christ called Himself the Bread of Life. The model prayer tells us to ask for that daily bread. It’s not just physical food, but the very Word of God. There are many references in the Bible to the harvest, threshing floor, etc. These references give us a wonderful mental image of the promises God has for all of mankind and His future plan for us.*

*I hope you will read our free booklets [God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind](#) and [The Church Jesus Built](#) for more information.*

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity