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It could happen to you!

In this economic climate, we are all vulnerable to losing our jobs. But you can be prepared.



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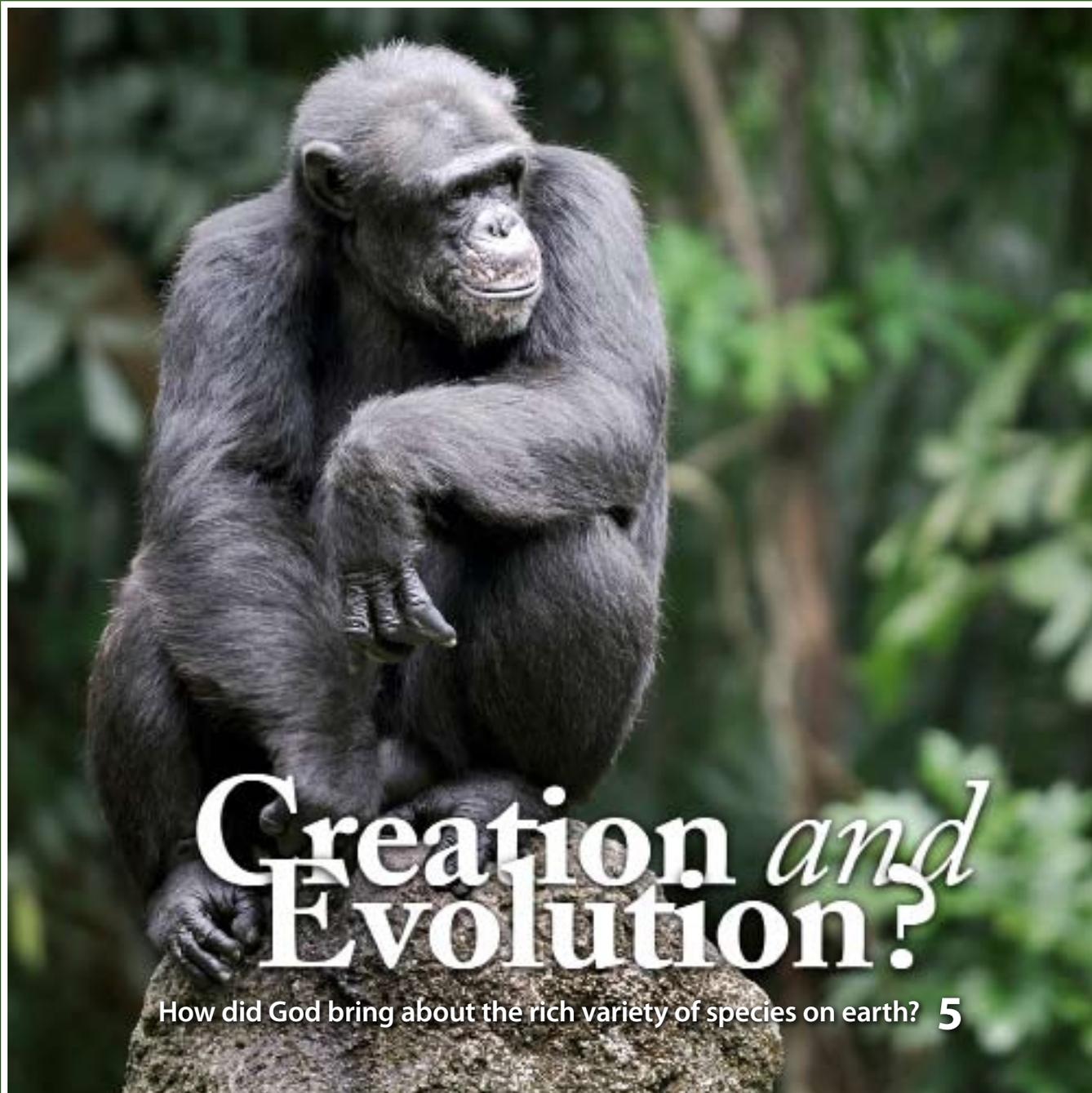
The Audacity to Hope

Entering a new Promised Land

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

February/March 2009

Exploring Life and Faith



Creation *and* Evolution?

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Letters to the Editor

I was rather perplexed after reading the article "Does God Hate Christmas," by Joseph Tkach, in the current edition of *Odyssey*. I've read and reread Amos 5:21: "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies." Could you please let me know what that means?

MA, email

CO: We're glad you asked. Amos 5:21 is referring to the attitude and conduct of the Israelites in observing the annual festivals God gave them. It does not condemn Christmas as a celebration of thanksgiving and worship toward Jesus Christ.

It might also be helpful to note that God never commanded the observance of Hanukkah, yet Jesus observed it. Similarly, God never commanded Purim, yet Jesus observed it too. Regarding Purim, notice the language in Esther 9:26-28: "Because of everything written in this letter and because of what they had seen and what had happened to them, the Jews took it upon themselves to decide that that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed. These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants" (underline ours). These festivals, like Christmas, were established by humans to celebrate things God had done.

Thank you for your Dec. article, "Does God Hate Christmas." In my own experience of spiritual transitioning from "not celebrating a holiday of pagan origins," to "celebrating the holiday in Christ," I have found it easiest to explain my change of heart with reference to his divine power to change.

My summary of faith is that Christ came to Earth fully human and fully God to make all

things new, so first I reference how Christ's humble life changes our understanding of life's pure value. Then I share how Christ's death on a pagan cross turned that offensive punishment into a pure symbol of his infallible grace. Finally, I celebrate that Christ's resurrection proves his dominion over all forces, even reversing death.

Since Christ accomplished all these and more, then what a perfect and complete testimony that celebrating Jesus' birth and death would also recreate pagan festivals into reminders of God's warmth, light, life, love, and grace!

RP, Wisconsin

As a long-time member of WCG, I read with interest Mike Fezell's article "Revelation: It's No Mystery." I believe he leaves much unexplained. He quotes Rev. 1:1, which states John's purpose as simply: "...to show what must soon take place." Yet in verse 19, Jesus says "write therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." It appears Revelation tells what will "soon take place" and what "will take place later." To me John was writing not only about events of his day.

I agree with Mr. Fezell that God's servants should avoid "prediction addiction." We have seen where that can lead. However, I believe like many prophecies, there will be a time for us to understand them. I see no shame in saying I do not understand. I believe if we stay close to God and want to please him, he will reveal all in his time.

JC, email

CO: We appreciate your positive comments and your desire to find meaning in the book of Revelation behind today's national and geopolitical turbulence. The article was not intended to be exhaustive, but only a brief overview. Indeed, John writes about what he "has seen," what is "is now," and "what will take place later" (Revelation 1:19). "What will take place later," however, is not in addition to what "must soon take

place" (Revelation 1:1) but is another way of referring to the same thing. The scope of the book is the fall of "Babylon," the victory of Christ, and the vindication of the saints. Revelation isn't referring to details of 21st-century politics.

I have noticed that you are often using the term "Trinitarian Theology" in this magazine and also in my local church. But don't all orthodox churches have a "Trinitarian theology"? Is there some particular aspect of Trinitarian theology that you are emphasizing?

AM, Indiana

Having a Christ-centered, or Trinitarian, theology does not simply mean believing in the doctrine of the Trinity. It means believing that this doctrine lies at the heart of all other doctrines. It means believing that the central Bible truth that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh and that he and the Father and the Spirit are one God, form the basis for how we understand everything we read in Scripture.

The Bible confronts us with a God who chooses to be God in Jesus, with Jesus and for Jesus, which means we cannot look outside of Jesus to understand who God is, or to define God.

In Jesus we meet God as God really is, the way God himself has revealed himself to be, as the God who is for us because he is for Jesus. In Jesus, we find that the Father loves us unconditionally, that he sent Jesus not out of anger and a need to punish someone, but out of his immeasurable love and his unbending commitment to human redemption.

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The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for

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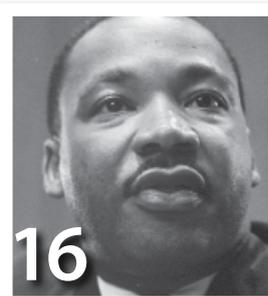
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In Search of the God of the Gasps

By John Halford

Three thousand years ago, King David looked up into the heavens and was moved to write with jaw-dropping awe:

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”¹

He actually couldn't see much of it. Without a telescope, you can only see a few thousand stars, the moon, an occasional comet or meteorite and five of the planets. So how much more, then, can we who have looked out to the very edge of the universe, and discovered trillions of stars in billions of galaxies, supernovae, quasars and black holes, proclaim the work of God's hands?

“By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being,”² wrote Paul, long before anyone had explored that Creation through the lenses of powerful telescopes on the ground and in space, electron microscopes and particle colliders. Using those instruments to enhance our senses, we have discovered hitherto undreamed-of levels of beauty and intricacy in the shimmering web of energy that underlies what we experience as physical matter and life.



It must be exciting to be a scientist today. It must be even more exciting to be a scientist who believes in God.

It must be exciting to be a scientist today. It must be even more exciting to be a scientist who believes in God, able to examine the natural world through eyes that recognize the work of the great Master Architect. How sad then, that so many believers see science as a threat and scientists as enemies of faith.

God in the Gaps

Nowhere is this more acute than in the ongoing battle between evolution and the first chapter of Genesis. Traditionally, opponents of evolution have pointed to the “gaps” in the theory, and highlighted these gaps as clear evidence of the need for a Creator. They do not seem to be aware that research has closed many of those gaps, and others are under investigation. Like it or not, the evidence is mounting that evolution through natural selection is the

way life develops. There have been many refinements and modifications since *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859, but it does now look as if Charles Darwin did not get it all wrong.

There need be no conflict between good science and faith in God. The world needs both, and never more so than now, as the next generation must face up to some unprecedented challenges. We desperately need fresh thinking and new ideas. We need to encourage Christian young men and women to join in the quest for scientific breakthroughs and new technologies. We need people motivated to use what they discover to serve their fellow human beings with humility, and treat their environment with respect.

Some scientists recognize this. In a remarkably frank book, *The Trouble with Physics*, physicist Lee Smolin explains what he believes is wrong with his field of expertise—theoretical physics. After guiding us through some of the revolutionary ideas that are being examined at the cutting edge of research, Smolin admits that progress has bogged down. The reason, he believes, is that many of his colleagues are blocking progress by clinging to obsolete ideas.

He says: “I believe there is something basic we are all missing, some wrong assumption we are all making. If this is so, we need to isolate the wrong assumption and replace it with a new idea.”³

Smolin's plea to his fellow physicists is that they not throttle the next generation of researchers. “The worst thing we could do would be to hold them back by insisting they work with our ideas.”⁴

Can we, as Christians, commissioned to bring the good news of the gospel to the world, speak with the same openness and candor?

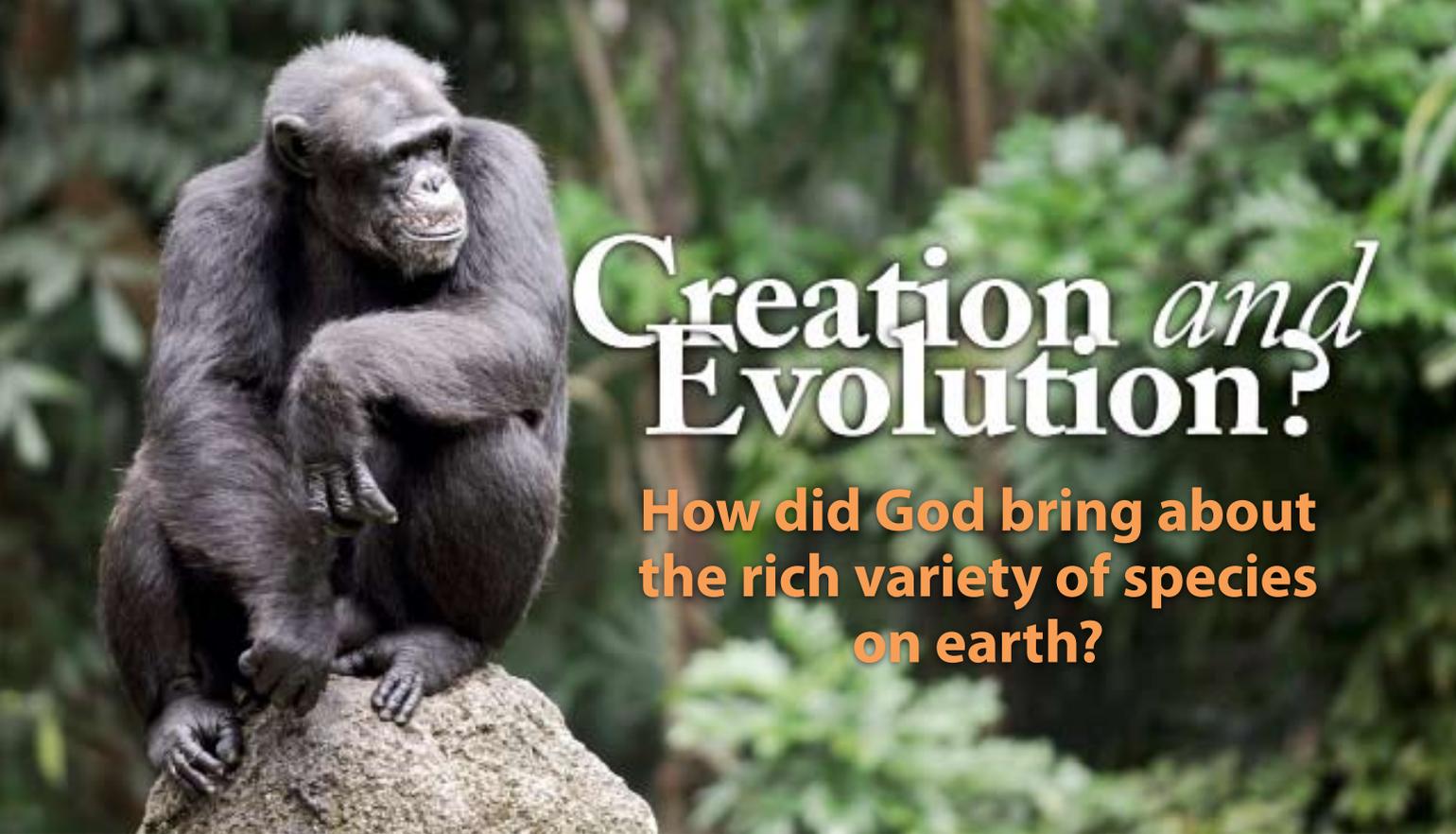
As with theoretical physics, we cannot afford to hold back our best young people by trapping them in hidebound concepts and anti-scientific worldviews. What the world needs now is not more people to desperately defend the increasingly beleaguered “God of the Gaps.” We need our best minds to join in the quest for innovation and discovery, and then stand back occasionally from what they are discovering in awe of the God of all Creation and gasp, “How great Thou art.”

¹ Psalm 19:1.

² Romans 1:20, *New Living Translation*.

³ Lee Smolin, *The Trouble with Physics*, p. 256.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 258.



Creation and Evolution?

How did God bring about the rich variety of species on earth?

Almost 150 years ago Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*. The debate between science and religion has been fast and furious ever since. Darwin proposed that life on earth began hundreds of millions of years ago and developed by evolution through natural selection—a stark contradiction of the Christian fundamentalist view that God created everything in six literal 24-hour days.

Theologians had been arguing since the days of Augustine about how to rightly interpret the Creation account in the first chapter of Genesis, but Darwin's revolutionary ideas gave the debate a new face. "If you don't believe Genesis 1 is literally true, then you are questioning the whole Bible," evolution's opponents declared. "Reject evolution and you lock yourself into an anti-scientific worldview that blocks progress," its supporters argued.

Have you ever wanted simply to talk about the issue in a calm and reasonable way, without being made to look foolish, ignorant or hostile either to the Bible or to scientific discovery? Perhaps such a conversation would go something like this:

I'm confused. I'm not a theologian and I'm not a scientist. But I know what the Bible says about how life began, and I also know basically how the theory of evolution

explains it. They can't both be right, can they? So who do I believe—God or the scientists?

That's a good question, but it isn't quite as easy as that. This is not a straightforward "either/or" issue. There are many sides to it with a lot of misunderstanding thrown in, and it is quite understandable that you are confused, so let's look at this broad question in some detail.

I have heard that some Christian denominations have dropped their opposition to the evolutionary theory and now accept evolution by natural selection as a valid explanation of the development of life.

Have you ever wanted simply to talk about the issue in a calm and reasonable way, without being made to look foolish, ignorant or hostile?

It's true that many major denominations have come to terms with Charles Darwin's theory, in one way or another. The Church of England has officially apologized to him for the decades of misrepresentation. However, millions of Christians still firmly reject evolution in favor of an explanation based on a more or less literal interpretation of the Genesis 1 account of Creation. This is particularly true in the United States,

where some surveys show that more than half the population claims not to believe in evolution.

There are two major schools of thought on how to resolve the conflict.

Really? What are they?

One is Creationism and the other is Intelligent Design. Creationism is a term to describe the belief that the Genesis 1 account of Creation should be understood in strictly literal terms. Creationists typically believe that the seven days in Genesis 1 were 24 hours in length, and they are adamant that anything short of this literalist interpretation necessarily leads to undermining the rest of the Bible.

The problem is that such an interpretation flies in the face of scientific research, and, for many, it defies common sense. Creationism is not allowed to be taught in public schools as an alternative to evolution, because it is considered a religious idea, not a scientific

winian evolution. But this was challenged in a historic case in York County, Pennsylvania, where it was ruled that Intelligent Design could not be classified as science, because it incorporated a supernatural element. Even though it did not specify the identity of the Designer, it was, in the court's opinion, another form of creationism. (See article on page 9.)

However, it isn't just the courts who have a problem with ID. Many scientists who are also committed Christians (and there *are* many) point out that although ID may at first seem to be a plausible approach, it is dependent on an unstable "God of the Gaps" theoretical foundation.

A what?

Opponents of Darwin's theory have always pointed out that there are inconsistencies and gaps that evolution by natural selection cannot explain. For example, they point out the lack of fossils of transition species.

They also make the point that when you consider the mathematical odds against even one living cell being formed by a chance combination of non-living components, there has not been enough time for evolution to have taken place. In fact, they say, the odds are so great as to be impossible, no matter how much time elapses.

These are reasonable objections—there do appear to be "gaps" in the theory of evolu-

The development of species over vast periods of time tells us that God either created some form of evolutionary process in the beginning or continually created new species by fiat over billions of years. In either case, creation was no cosmic "accident."



one. If we're realistic, we have to admit that this is true. Creationism does not offer a proven, rigorous and valid scientific alternative to evolution, but is based on a single narrow interpretation of the first chapter of the Bible.

Many Christians prefer an alternative explanation, known as "Intelligent Design" (ID). Proponents of ID accept the findings of science, but argue that evolution cannot explain certain features in the development of life. These unexplained features, or "gaps," are evidence of an "intelligent Designer," they claim.

In an effort to skirt the ban on teaching religion as science in public schools, they do not insist that the Designer be called God. They thus hoped that ID could be taught in schools as an alternative to Dar-

winian evolution. Opponents of evolution then seize on those "gaps" as evidence of the supernatural action of the Creator, who becomes "the God of the Gaps."

The trouble is that any time further research fills in a particular gap, the "God of the Gaps" idea loses some of its force. Breakthroughs in scientific disciplines such as molecular biology have refined the theory of evolution by natural selection and have steadily eroded what once looked like irrefutable arguments against evolution. The "God of the Gaps" domain is steadily shrinking. Not all the gaps have closed yet, and there are still some important unanswered questions. But as new research continues to uncover answers, the traditional challenges to evolu-

tion are losing ground.

A growing number of believing scientists are recognizing that to fight a rearguard action for the “God of the Gaps” is not the right approach. A fact is a fact, even if it is an inconvenient one. And if the facts show that evolution is the most likely explanation for the development of species, they must come to terms with it. They call themselves Theistic Evolutionists.

“Theistic Evolution”! Sounds like a contradiction in terms.

Maybe, but it isn’t. Theistic evolutionists accept the findings of science, and see no contradiction between the theory of evolution and a proper understanding of the biblical account in Genesis 1.

But surely there is a contradiction. Evolution claims that species have evolved over hundreds of millions of years. Doesn’t this contradict what the Bible says—that God directly created each and every life form?

Not necessarily. The Bible only tells us that God is Creator; it says nothing about *how* he created. The scientific evidence does indicate that the various species of life have evolved over a very long period of time.

But how can we be so sure about that?

We can’t be 100 percent sure, of course. All science can do is study the evidence that has been left behind in fossil form and apply current knowledge and techniques, such as genetic science and the various radiometric dating methods, in order to form conclusions that seem in keeping with the evidence.

What theistic evolutionists are saying is that the revelation of the Bible in no way rules out the possibility of life forms evolving through time. Although the number of theistic evolutionists is still small, they have introduced some ideas that are worth considering. [Readers who would like to know more will find a short list of books on this topic in the “I’ve Been Reading” feature on page 21.]

But why would God have used a process like evolution?

Why not? You could equally well ask, “Why did Creation take him six days? Couldn’t he have done it all in one instant?” But leaving the question of life for a moment, let’s take a look at the way God may have brought the universe into existence.

Most scientists believe that our vast universe came into being in one “big bang” some 15 billion years ago. Not all believe this, but let’s say for argument’s sake that this *is* when and how the universe got started. At the moment of the big bang and for some considerable time afterwards, galaxies, stars and planets did not exist. The universe evolved over billions of years to a kind of soup of hydrogen atoms, and then expanded over more billions of years during which galaxies, stars, planets and other elements of the universe came into existence. Thus the universe became what it is today through gradual development, the natural consequences of God’s *original* creative act. Perhaps God also did something like that with life on earth. The point

is that a process like evolution need not contradict the reality that God is Creator.

But if you accept that the universe is 15 billion years old and that life on earth is billions of years old, doesn’t that contradict the biblical revelation in Genesis 1 that God created everything in six literal days or, as a few Creationists suggest, several thousand years?

It contradicts only if you insist on a literal interpretation of Genesis 1. And if you insist on a literal interpretation of this skeletal framework of days, this could *only* be six 24-hour periods.

The first problem with accepting a six-day creation is that it flies in the face of common logic and everything that has been discovered about how the universe came into existence and developed. (As you say, a few Creationists have stepped back from a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and have assigned a life to the universe in the tens of thousands of years. Their reasoning not only ignores science, but manufactures a new interpretation of Genesis 1 based on their own imagination.)

All theories of a “young universe” are contradicted by the evidence of astrophysics about the age of the universe and from geology and paleontology about the age of the earth. On the other hand, accepting an age of the universe in the billions of years does not contradict either science or the biblical witness. The Bible only says that God created all things that exist; it does not speak to the question of the *manner* of the creative process or *how long* the creative process took—or whether it is continuing even today.

Are you saying that a literal interpretation of the Bible is wrong?

It depends on the passage. Parts of the Bible that are intended to be understood literally should be understood literally, and parts that are intended to be understood figuratively should be taken figuratively. For example, some 40 percent of the Bible consists of poetry and metaphors.

It is a *misinterpretation* of the Bible to interpret poetic statements literally. For example, God is not a literal hen, rock, tower, or shepherd, even though the Bible describes him in such terms. Likewise, when Jesus said the Pharisees were blind guides and that they swallow camels, he did not intend for anyone to interpret his statements literally; he intended that they be interpreted figuratively. Nor did Jesus intend that people interpret his parables as literal stories of literal people; he intended them to be understood as parables—made-up stories that illustrate a point.

It is not watering down the Bible to read it the way it is intended. Poetry should be understood as poetry, metaphors as metaphors, similes as similes, and parables as parables. “Literal” and “true” are not the same thing, and the truth is, to interpret things literally that are not intended to be interpreted literally is to *miss* the truth completely.

I hadn’t thought about it that way. So give me an example

of how Genesis 1 can be interpreted in a poetic or metaphorical way.

Think of the writer of Genesis 1 as living at a time when common oral (and eventually written) traditions included creation epics that presented visible phenomena, such as the stars, the planets, the sun, moon, land, sea and animals, as gods. Some of these creation epics began with a preexistent primordial mound out of which the first god springs, who then in one way or another produces the other gods. Another variation has the sea as the first god. Such epics were the standard approach to explaining the origin of the universe.

Contrast that with the Creation story in Genesis 1. It uses the standard style and genre of creation epics at the time. But using that standard style, it makes the radical declaration that the God of Israel, completely unlike all the gods of the nations, did not emerge from anything, nor was he ever part of the universe. Quite the contrary, this God created everything out of nothing simply by the power of his word. Each of the things thought of by the nations as being gods is systematically presented as having been created by this God and being declared “good” by this God, demonstrating his utter power over them.

Genesis 1 is about the *Who* of Creation, not the *how*. We should let the writer of Genesis 1 make his theological statement to us about who God is as Creator in contrast to the gods of the nations and not try to interpret him as providing us some kind of scientific police blotter of literal events and dates.

*So should we be distinguishing between the **fact** that God created all things on one hand and **how** he might have caused it all to come about on the other?*

Yes. There is a needless conflict between science and religion on the matter of the Creation. The biblical revelation tells us that the God who revealed himself to Israel and who has revealed himself to humanity in Jesus Christ is the Creator of all that exists. This revelation is not interested in detailing the physical processes he might have used to bring about this universe that humanity is part of and has, as God’s gift, both the capacity and the joy of studying and learning about.

This means that nothing factual that science can say about how the universe came into being or how the process of creation has unfolded throughout the history of the earth can contradict the biblical revelation—as long as the scientific speculation doesn’t conclude that God is *not* the Creator of all that exists.

But doesn’t evolutionary theory insist that everything came into existence without a Creator?

No. It’s true that some scientists claim that everything came into being naturally, spontaneously—without God’s original creative act. But that is a philosophical statement, not a scientific one.

On the other hand, many scientists do believe in God, and they do not discount the biblical revelation that God is Creator. They do their scientific work by studying the physical phenomena in the universe that are the result of God’s creative act. They accept that Genesis 1 tells us *that* God has created all things, but recognize that Genesis 1 does not tell us *how* the creation process has unfolded or *how long* it has taken to unfold. Scientists, using whatever evidence is available, seek to better understand the wonders of the amazing universe God has brought into being.



God created everything out of nothing simply by the power of His word.

So where does that leave me—the average person? What is the proper approach for a Christian?

We suggest curiosity mixed with humility. There are strident and often angry voices raised on both sides of this question. They only make the argument increasingly bitter and the divide wider. The fact that many scientists can accept the findings of science that point to evolutionary changes in the forms of life, while remaining committed to their Christian faith, should be encouraging to the rest of us. It does not have to be an either/or argument.

In fact, it does not have to be an argument at all. Realistic scientists know that they might never uncover all the mysteries of creation.

“Take a long, hard look. See how great he is—infinite, greater than anything you could ever imagine or figure out!” (Job 36:26, Message Bible)

But as the Proverbs remind us: “*God delights in concealing things; scientists delight in discovering things*” (Proverbs 25:2, Message Bible). We may never fully resolve these questions in this life, but it is a legitimate and exciting quest, and we are discovering wonderful things along the way.

The Worldwide Church of God, publishers of this magazine, sums it up like this:

“We believe that God gave the scientific record for human instruction and knowledge and that there is no conflict between the Bible and science. We believe that when the Bible and scientific discovery appear to conflict, that one or the other has been misunderstood. Therefore, we do not deny the evidence from science that indicates a long history of life on this planet. We believe that only God can create life, and that the Creator has not revealed exactly how he has done this.” **co**

Should Intelligent Design Be Taught in the Science Classroom?

In the last few years the concept of Intelligent Design (ID) has really hit the news headlines. Articles in major weeklies like *Time* and editorials in other magazines and newspapers have discussed the pros and cons of the controversy, which has been raging especially in the United States.

What is Intelligent Design? It is the idea that, because the universe and life are so complex, they must be the deliberate creation of a higher power. That power is not usually named as God by ID enthusiasts—the point of Intelligent Design theory is merely to introduce the notion of a Designer into the science classroom, as a counter to evolutionism, without necessarily making a statement about who the designer may be.

Predictably, the scientific community has reacted very strongly against this. They say it is merely a ploy to introduce the creationist interpretation of origins into education. [Strictly, Creationism is a particular interpretation of Genesis 1, the first chapter in the Bible. What might be called “young-earth creationists” argue that the universe, earth, and all life were created in just six days about 10,000 years ago. But the term is usually also applied to “old-earth creationists,” who accept scientific evidence that the universe is billions of years old but nevertheless argue that God created all there is by separate acts of fiat (“Let there be ...”) during those billions of years.] Most scientists, on the other hand, including many Christian scientists, point out that science cannot prove the existence of God, therefore invoking him to explain something in nature that we may not yet understand, in fact explains nothing. To do so brings all scientific enquiry to a halt.

Ironically, these scientists may have Scripture on their side. Jesus Christ specifically said, “God is Spirit.” What this means is that God, who created time, space and matter, is outside time and space and is non-material, therefore he cannot be detected by the tools of science. He cannot be seen, measured, weighed, quantified, or objectified.

Science is simply inadequate to the task of pointing to any one difficult-to-explain gap in scientific knowledge and saying, “There, this definitely, measurably, objectively proves beyond all doubt that God is responsible for the existence of...” The sentence might be completed in any number of ways, such as: the

fundamental forces of nature, star formation, proteins and nucleic acids, living cells, complex organs like the eye, species, and so on. This doesn’t mean God may not be behind all these things—it’s just that the scientific method cannot prove it one way or the other.

This actually poses no problem to Christianity. Christian scholars and commentators note that the Bible points out that God can only be known spiritually and relationally. While the Bible does clearly say that the creation is God’s handiwork and gives evidence of his existence, this is in terms of general revelation. This is why some Christian scientists have no difficulty with, say, the concept of biological evolution, arguing that God fully gifted the creation with the ability to be and to become. These scientists make a distinction between evolution (a natural process that may itself have been created) and *evolutionism* (an atheistic philosophy that denies the possibility of a creator). Whatever the case, many theologians are themselves agreeing that the idea of Intelligent Design does not belong in the science classroom, though it certainly belongs in classes on religion or cultural history.

This is why, on November 18, 2005, the Vatican’s chief astronomer, astrophysicist George Coyne, stated that “Intelligent Design” isn’t science and doesn’t belong in science classrooms. While reaffirming God’s role in creation, he said that science explains the history of the universe. Even the conservative U.S. ministry group *Reasons to Believe* recently stated, “As it currently stands, we believe ID should *not* be taught in biology class. That is not to say we think there’s a lack of evidence in the record of nature for the work of an Intelligent Designer. Far from it! ... However, at this juncture, ID isn’t formulated as a scientific theory. To date, ID has not developed an origins model with scientifically testable assertions and falsifiable predictions. No ID theory accounts for the history of the universe and of life. There are no ID predictions about what scientists should discover when they examine the record of nature. Without a testable model, ID cannot guide future scientific investigation.” **co**



Dennis Gordon, who lives in New Zealand with his wife Brenda and 13-year-old son Adrian, is a marine biologist at a Crown Research Institute and serves on the Wellington Council of Churches.

Little Stars

A Story of Faith, Love and Vision from Thailand

By John Halford

Chiang Mai, Thailand: I first met Chogait Garmolgomut in the early '80s, when I was International Student Coordinator for Ambassador College in Pasadena, California.

Chogait was tall for a Thai, but was soft spoken, as is typical of Thai people. He told me he had been brought up in Chonburi, near Bangkok, but after his mother had married an American serviceman he came to live in the USA. When I met him, he was living with his step-grandparents in Arizona. He had been brought up in Buddhism, but after coming to understand Christianity he had converted.

Ambassador College had several projects in Thailand, particularly among the Hill Tribe minorities in the North. I could see there would be a need for Thai speakers, so I encouraged Chogait to apply to the college. He was hesitant at first, but he eventually did.

Chogait was intelligent and diligent and he did well in his studies, but he did not find the experience easy. The boisterous American college environment can be challenging for someone used to the more gentle rhythms of Thai culture.

The idea of public speaking and vigorous competitive sports were especially intimidating. However, with much encouragement and support from the late Professor Herman Hoeh, who had a deep interest in all things Thai, Chogait made it to graduation. He then returned to Thailand with a dream of reaching his people with the gospel.

Thailand is a deeply traditional society, where respect for one's elders, the monarchy and the religion of the country are firmly entrenched. Or had been. Thailand was developing fast, people were prospering, and modernization was taking its toll on the traditional way of life. Young Thais were abandoning the old values and losing their sense of the sacred.

Chogait wanted to help. He settled in Chiang Mai, Thailand's second-largest city, and enrolled in some courses in Buddhist Studies at the University. He knew that if he was to be effective, he needed more

education and experience. What he didn't know was that he also needed Fong.

Ahmphong—or Fong—was a young lady who was taking some of the same courses as Chogait. She was a committed Buddhist, and approached her studies with devotion. She was intrigued by this tall, quiet man who took copious notes on everything. One day she asked if she could see his notes on a lecture she had missed.

Fong was surprised at what she read. Chogait's observations about the lecture challenged her belief. Fong and Chogait developed a friendship, and she continued to read his notes. "I didn't have to say anything," Chogait remembers. "I just kept on taking notes the way I had been and Fong kept on reading them, and eventually she talked herself into becoming a Christian."

Fong accepted Jesus Christ as her Savior and was baptized. The couple also fell in love and were married. Chogait now had a partner who shared his dream of reaching their people with the gospel.

Chogait had by this time come to the conclusion that traditional Christian missionary methods in Thailand were not effective. "There is a tremendous amount of activity, but not much to show for it," he says. "I love my people. I wanted to help them—and help them see the good things that God has shown me."

The young couple were not interested in starting yet another church. "What we needed was to develop a community of people who understand Christian values," they said. Education was the vehicle that had brought them both to understanding the gospel. So, they decided, education would be the tool they would



use to reach others. The English language is one of the keys to success in modern Thailand, and Chogait and Fong were fluent in English. They decided to start a bilingual school for young children, with classes in English and Thai. It would not be a religious school, but it would be run on Christian principles and values. Chogait adopted St. Francis' famous advice: "Preach the gospel by all means available to you. If necessary, use words."

They opened their first school in the basement of their home, with only 10 students. But word got

some enthusiastic worship, led by Chogait, Fong and their two children, Patrick and Linda. (Whatever had become of the shy young man who did not want to take public speaking class, I wondered, as I watched him lead worship.)

Chogait and Fong's story is a remarkable example of faith and vision. They have succeeded in planting a thriving Christian community where many others have failed.

What next? Chogait and Fong drove me to the outskirts of Chiang Mai, to an empty office building.



around that the little school delivered a quality product at a fair price. Soon they were able to open another school. Then another, and another. Today they have a network of ten schools in the north and north-east of Thailand, including a delightful Nursery and Kindergarten called Little Stars.

The staff is mainly Thai, although they have a few foreign teachers. "We don't insist that our teachers are Christians, providing they subscribe to our values," says Chogait. But many of the teachers have accepted Christianity, and at weekends the Garmolgomut home becomes a vigorous house church, with up to 100 attending. These meetings are an occasion for

"This will be our new school," they explained. "Here we will open the Ambassador Bilingual School for grades K-6, and teach the basics, and also English. Underlying it will be the focus on right values and leadership."

Right now the grounds are overgrown, and the building is vacant. But Chogait and Fong enthusiastically described their plans to have the empty rooms and halls filled with the sound of children learning, singing and playing. It is an ambitious project, but Chogait and Fong hope to open the ABS in May.

Would you like to help? The school is not asking for direct financial support, but it can use quality English language books, suitable for ages K-6, new or gently used. Bible stories and teaching materials, DVDs, videos, picture dictionaries, games, books on natural history, and other educational material in English would also be very welcome.

If you'd like to know more, write to me in care of *Christian Odyssey* or send me an email (john.halford@wcg.org) and I'll send you more details.

Chogait and Fong would also like to hear from any teachers, especially those with child education degrees, who would be interested in experiencing a unique teaching opportunity for a few months.

If you would like to know more about the school, the website is www.abs-primary.com. co

Washing Your Children in the Word

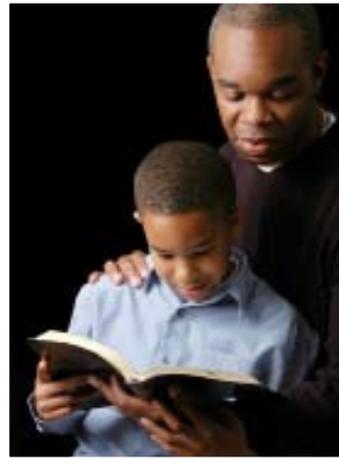
By Jeb Egbert

I was recently reflecting on a particularly difficult period of my life, a time when my wife, Barb, and I were going through an intense trial.

At the time, my reflexive reaction was, “What is this? Why me, Lord? How come this is happening to us?” But almost instantaneously a scripture entered my thoughts: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” A sense of calm and peace settled over me.

At my moment of intense need, Romans 8:28 had washed over my mind.

I was grateful to the Holy Spirit for being the Comforter that he is described to be in John 14, amazed at how this passage had come to me in my moment of difficulty. That’s when it hit me how valuable my parents’ work had been of instilling the word of God into their children. I doubt they ever stopped to think, “This memory scripture will some



Another suggestion is to find a time during the week when the family can gather for Bible study. A newer Bible translation, such as Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*, is relatively easy even for young children to understand.

When our children were younger, my wife and I committed to reading the entire Bible to our children. We found that breakfast was a good

time to pursue this goal. Our intent was not to race through it, but rather to take just a few verses every day. After reading a verse or two, I would ask my children questions to see what they thought about the passages.

When I was young, my parents gave my sister and me scripture memory cards. At the time, it seemed like drudgery, but since then I have become grateful that my parents spent the time. Many of the scriptures I memorized with them have brought me reassurance and comfort during difficult times.

A final thought is to use websites that specialize in activities or games geared to help children learn the Bible. One such site is www.bibleactivities.com.

No matter how you do it, helping children learn the Bible is an important responsibility for Christian parents and guardians. In his book *Revolutionary Parenting*, George Barna writes, “Most of our children are biblically illiterate.”

But that does not have to be true in your household. When you stop to think about all the things that *could* fill our children’s heads, what is better or more important than the timeless words of the Bible? ∞

Jeb Egbert has focused on youth ministry and education for 30 years. He has spent considerable time working in camp ministry and has taught at the secondary and post-secondary levels. He earned his Doctorate in Education from Texas A & M. He is currently the Vice President of Academic Affairs for Argosy University in Southern California.



No matter how you do it, helping children learn the Bible is an important responsibility for Christian parents and guardians.

day come back to Jeb at a time when he needs it most.” But indeed it had.

What are some ways we can help our children or grandchildren learn the Bible and memorize scriptures that contain words of life?

One effective way, especially when working with small children, is to use fun songs that are based upon Scripture. My children memorized all the books of the Bible from a song.

At my church, the worship leader often encourages members to “sing the words of God into their hearts.” Numerous times throughout the week I find myself repeating in my mind a song we’d sung during the Sunday service.

Websites such as www.mywonderkids.com provide age-based music and songs for children that help them memorize Bible verses or become familiar with biblical characters and stories.

It Could Happen to You!

By Mat Morgan

One of the most disruptive and fearful situations that we will face in our lives is the sudden loss of a job. Perhaps you think you are immune to that because of long tenure or experience. Don't get too comfortable, especially in this difficult economic environment.

The wise thing to do is prepare now! Following are a few steps you can take even while employed to prepare for the future.

Work like you are a new employee. The single most important task for nearly everyone in this job market is to keep your current job. Say yes, when challenged with a new project, and tackle it with an open mind and enthusiasm. Don't think that your current skills or position will be enough. Go above and beyond to be the employee that the company can't do without.

Evaluate your strengths and weaknesses against the current skills needed in today's modern work force. Update needed skills through continuing education.

Network. Don't neglect meetings with trade or industry associates. This type of networking helps maintain relevant job skills and contact with friends and associates who often are in a position to provide valuable leads and/or recommendations to available jobs if an unexpected job loss occurs. Job-hunting with friends is much more productive and less daunting than cold calls or resumes sent to people you don't know.

Maintain a sharp resume. Keep your resume up to date both in terms of your experience and skills and with relevant language for today's working environ-

ment. Periodically have trusted friends and professionals who specialize in crafting effective resumes review and improve it. Be sure it is in a format that can be electronically circulated. A word of caution: Don't work on your resume in places where your supervisor or others might get the impression that you are looking for other work. Remember, the most important job in this environment is keeping your current job.

Maintain an emergency fund. Keep an accessible emergency fund that you can rely on for three to six months. It might take you this long or longer to find a job in a difficult job market. Keep in mind the story of Joseph (Genesis 41-45) who helped himself, his family and Egypt by planning ahead for the lean years.



By following a few wise steps now, we can all be better prepared if the worst should happen.

Live within your means. Avoid credit-card debt or other consumer debt. If you have this type of debt, work hard to pay it off so that it won't be a ball and chain during a jobless period, or now, for that matter!

Sometimes, despite all our best efforts, we find ourselves without a job or in some other difficult circumstance. Maybe it is a result of our poor decisions or just bad circumstances. If this is where we find ourselves, we can rest assured that we are not alone. Jesus reminds us that our Father knows our needs, and he will take care of them (Matthew 6:25-34).

We can always find hope and peace in the depth of God's love even though we make mistakes. He never changes, and he knows who we are, where we are and what we need. **co**

I Thought I Would Lose My Job!

By Ken Williams

More of us are experiencing financial insecurity these days. We know we should have faith in God, seek wise advice, keep clear minds and take positive action. We know that Jesus told us not to be obsessed with financial security. Nevertheless, the temptation to panic is strong in the deepening global recession. This has been my experience of late.

My employer values my service and I value my employer, but the struggling U.S. economy required my supervisor to make budget cuts. A few months ago he reluctantly informed me that I could be unemployed by the end of 2008. I knew that I needed to rely on God, network with others who could help me, remain focused, and take positive action. But I became distracted and started to worry.

It was evident that God was helping me by providing good advice and resources through others.



Though I wasn't alone, I felt alone. Talking to God, family and friends, seeking their advice and asking for their prayers was an important first step. A close friend and local businessman here in Rochester, New York, assessed my situation and asked me what I was doing to prepare for unemployment. I told him I wanted to take a day a week to go to a local organization that helps people make career changes and follow their advice. RochesterWorks is the largest employment and training program in Monroe County and is dedicated to helping people in the Rochester region.

My friend listened to my description of the half-

empty part of the "glass of my life" and then asked me what day *exactly* would I go to RochesterWorks and get started. He knew I was procrastinating. He jokingly stated that I didn't want to belong to Procrastinator's Anonymous because they never meet. His joke irritated me. Me a procrastinator! So I registered that day.

It was humbling to stand in long lines, register, be interviewed, and stumble as I attempted to answer vital questions with insufficient information. I hadn't written a resume since I was a senior in college in 1970. My first counselor read my resume and listened to my story. Then he looked at me across his desk and said, "At your age, and with 38 years working for the same organization, you aren't exactly a prime candidate for being hired in this job market." His directness really annoyed me, but it got me thinking more practically and realistically.

The staff at RochesterWorks is available, well informed, and willing to share resources. But it was clear that whatever help I needed would be given only if I asked and went after it. I had asked God for another job, but he seemed more interested in helping me gain some needed experience. It became evident that God was helping me by providing good advice and resources through others.

Counselors were readily accessible and able to help me consider options that I would have missed. I was even able to help some of them in return. Serving and being served is critical in all areas of life, and no

less so in seeking a job. I realized that changing careers wouldn't be easy. But I could see a path to walk and there seemed to be a glimmer of light at the end.

I attended workshops with people of college age, middle age, male and female, various races and cultures. Some were college educated, some had post-graduate degrees and others were without high-school diplomas or we probably would never have met under normal circumstances. We found common ground in our financial insecurity and in our need to support one another. We attended workshops that equipped us in writing resumes, answering difficult questions that

Using Knowledge Wisely

By Barbara Dahlgren

Not long ago I was conversing with a man about some special understanding he had reached while doing biblical research. Actually, I use the word “conversing” loosely, since it takes two people to have a conversation and this guy definitely was not interested in anything I had to say. It was somewhat interesting, but the pontification went on for a long time. I tuned out somewhere between the genealogies, archeological findings, and where everyone had it all wrong but him.

Finally, when he took a breath, I said, “That’s interesting. How do you feel all these findings have enhanced your walk with Jesus Christ?”

I expected him to expound on proving the Bible true or God’s existence or something somewhat significant. Instead he just looked perplexed and almost speechless for a moment. Then he replied, “I don’t think it has.”

“That’s too bad,” I said. “What good is all this knowledge if it doesn’t draw you closer to God?”

As he started to spout a few more facts and data, I excused myself. My “polite-listening” gene had reached its limit. Let him bore someone else with his “special” understanding. What good is this kind of knowledge if it doesn’t enhance one’s relationship with Jesus Christ?

Knowledge, even biblical knowledge, is not synonymous with wisdom or spiritual maturity. Knowledge is merely information. If not used to edify the body of Christ, it can just “puff” you up—not build you up. And it can be incredibly boring! That “nana nana boo boo...I know more than you do” officiousness will not win souls for Christ. First Corinthians 8:1 says that knowledge may make us feel important, but love builds up the church. The purpose of knowledge and scriptures should be to point us to Jesus Christ (John 5:39, 40).

We study the Bible not so much to know about God, but rather to know God and develop an intimate relationship with him. Knowing about archeological findings might be interesting, but knowing how Jesus handled certain situations can teach us how to live. How did he treat people? How was his relationship with God manifested? Sometimes we build whole doctrines around one or two scriptures we do not fully understand and totally ignore the hundreds of scriptures focusing on believing in God, praising God, loving God, and loving one another. Did you know that the phrase “love one another” is mentioned more than 12 times in the New Testament?

Bible study is essential for Christian growth. Using other reference sources to elevate that study is commendable. No one loves a trivia tidbit better than I do. It can stimulate us mentally and cause us to dig deeper into the Scriptures. But let’s never forget that God is not looking for “head” knowledge as much as he is for “heart” knowledge. Using what we learn to draw closer to God, enhance our relationship with him, and be better representatives of Jesus Christ are ways we can use our knowledge wisely. ☪

come up in interviews, networking and building relationships, and working with staffing agencies. As our groups worked together sharing insight, contacts and resources, we found our differences were actually beneficial. We represent a broad range of our local community and provide a multitude of counselors to rely on.

In time I was invited to join two job networking groups that meet weekly. We were told that 85 percent of jobs in this area are gained through networking and fewer than 15 percent are acquired through handing out resumes. Fifteen percent sounds small, but the time spent preparing and distributing resumes is essential, even though coming together to support one another and sharing information and contacts through networking is even more critical. We were taught that we were not to come to job networks only for what we could get, but rather to find ways to serve the other members. We could be of service to others even if we didn’t receive what we were looking for that day. We were taught to do some community service during unemployment with the intent of serving and making new contacts for possible job leads.

The staff at RochesterWorks presented options I wouldn’t have normally considered and could never have discovered on my own. They invited me to attend a panel of six Human Resource representatives from local companies that manufacture machine parts for other manufacturers. I wanted to turn the invitation down because I haven’t had any machining experience. They reminded me that they have successfully helped people change careers and find jobs and that I needed to follow their advice since I was facing unemployment. The logic was inescapable.

As I listened to these company reps, it occurred to me that they were doing for their organization what I had done for my church all my life—teaching, encouraging, assessing and helping people find their niche. Those were *my* skills too. Suddenly many more organizations than I had imagined possible appeared to be potential employers. I probably would not have made a good machinist, but I had learned through networking to broaden my perspective. It was a great morale booster.

A month ago my boss called me to let me know that I can remain employed. I’m grateful to God and my employer. But I’m also grateful that I had to confront my fear of economic insecurity. I found I couldn’t do it alone. With God and others, I am able to face challenges and accept life on its terms. I learned that there are resources if I ask and look for them. I learned that freedom from worry is better than freedom from economic insecurity.

Jesus told his disciples “do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” He reminded them—and us—that he will do for us what we can’t do for ourselves. He wants us to have his peace even when faced with unemployment.

None of us are guaranteed to be free from financial insecurity, but we are all promised that we can be free from the fear of it. ☪

The Audacity to Hope

By Jeffrey Broadnax

I hadn't yet been born when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. pricked the conscience of the nation with the audacity to hope that America would live out the true meaning of its creed that "all men are created equal."

Less than three weeks after I entered the world, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. With the stroke of a pen, he granted fair and equal access for people of color to exercise their right to vote. This mandated full payment of the check known as the Fifteenth Amendment and an end to a century of justice denied.

In April 1968, a few months before my third birthday, a single gunshot echoed on a Memphis balcony, accentuating a seismic paradigm shift that had reverberated through the conscience and culture

I burst with pride to realize that now for young blacks "President of the United States" is no longer a pipe-dream answer to the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

of American society. The shot may have silenced the dreamer, but the seeds of Dr. King's God-inspired vision of imminent entry into the "promised land" had already been planted.

I am amazed that 40 years after people with the audacity to believe things could change bore signs declaring "I Am a Man," they can now bear signs declaring "Change We Can Believe In" as they elect the first black President of the United States of America.

As a 43-year-old African American male, I am humbled by the sweat, tears and blood of those whose impassioned struggle enabled my children and me to live in a nation where we are judged primarily by the content of our character. I burst with pride to realize that now for young blacks "President of the United States" is no longer a pipe-dream answer to the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

How blessed I have been to grow up able to drink

from any water fountain, gain any level of education, ride any bus, buy any house, speak to any person and be an advocate for any cause within my sphere of reference. My greatest joy, however, is knowing that God granted me the ability not only to taste the fruit of the promised land called "equality," but he equipped me, as a pastor, to be a tour guide and an ambassador of his love, justice and peace.



President Barack Obama

As I watch President Obama be sworn in, I feel my heart, my history, my hopes and my cultural passport indelibly stamped with the term "American." At last the weave of history seems to be blending black, brown, yellow, red, white and blue into one beautiful tapestry of hope.

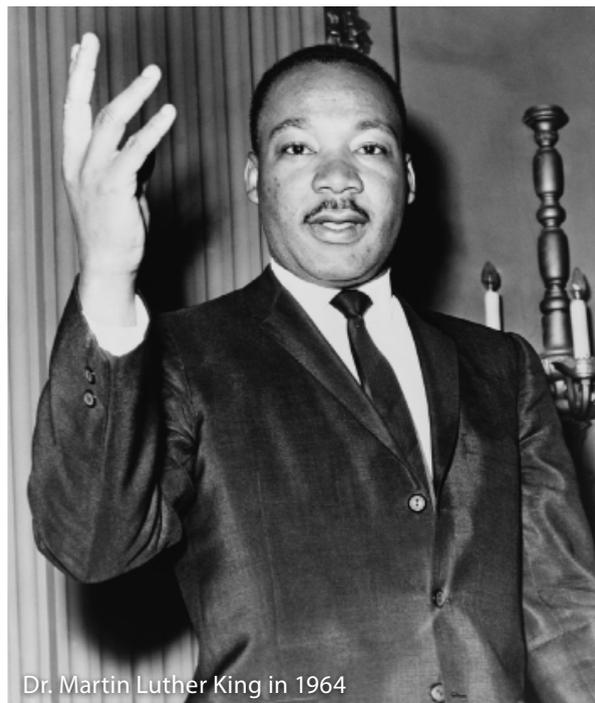
The man who had the audacity to hope that a majority of Americans would embrace his vision and vote for him despite color, race, name or party affiliation put his hand on the Bible with his wife and two daughters by his side and swore to lead this nation into its God-ordained future.

January 20, 2009, marked a new beginning. In the shadow of such luminaries as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln, President Barack Obama's swearing in synthesized a segregated American past, an integrated American present and a united American future.

I pray that the novelty of his being the first African-American President will be eclipsed by the content of his character. I pray his vision, his leadership, and his convictions will be seen through his diverse upbringing and not simply the color of his skin.

I am hopeful about President Obama and excited for our generation and the generations to follow. As I reflect on 1968 and Dr. King's "I have seen the Promised Land" speech, it thrills me that one more obstacle to equality for African Americans has been hurdled.

I find myself wondering how things must have changed for the Israelites when after 40 long years of wandering in the wilderness on their way to the Promised



Dr. Martin Luther King in 1964

Land they finally entered it. Forty years of experience had to be converted to wisdom and action as they were no longer mere travelers, but vested inhabitants and stewards of a great responsibility.

I think that today, like Israel, we must embrace and remember our long journey even as we enter the new land with all the resolve and courage we can muster. There are giants in the land, but in joy and determination we must trust God and persevere.

I believe America should feel empowered by President Obama's election. We have a fresh opportunity to further unite these United States of America, and if we will, we can also have the audacity to believe that God has granted ours and future generations the strength to share, at home and abroad, true liberty and justice for all. ∞



Jeff Broadnax is a pastor of several congregations in the New York area.



Barack and Michelle Obama 2008



March on Washington 1963



President Johnson signs Civil Rights Act 1964

The Forgettery

By Nanette Kuhlman

A conversation with one of my teenage sons sometimes goes kind of like this: I say, "Did you make your bed?" He gives me a blank stare, then races to his room spouting the words, "I forgot."

"I forgot" covers for a whole host of less legitimate excuses, like "I really didn't want to" or "it wasn't that important to me." My husband calls this "I forgot" syndrome the Forgettery, a place in the mind where we file requests or obligations that we just plain don't want to do.

"He must have filed it in his Forgettery," my husband says, as my son slinks into the bathroom to hang up his bath towel.

"That Forgettery is going to be expensive," I say. (I found that charging the boys 50 cents each time I have to do one of

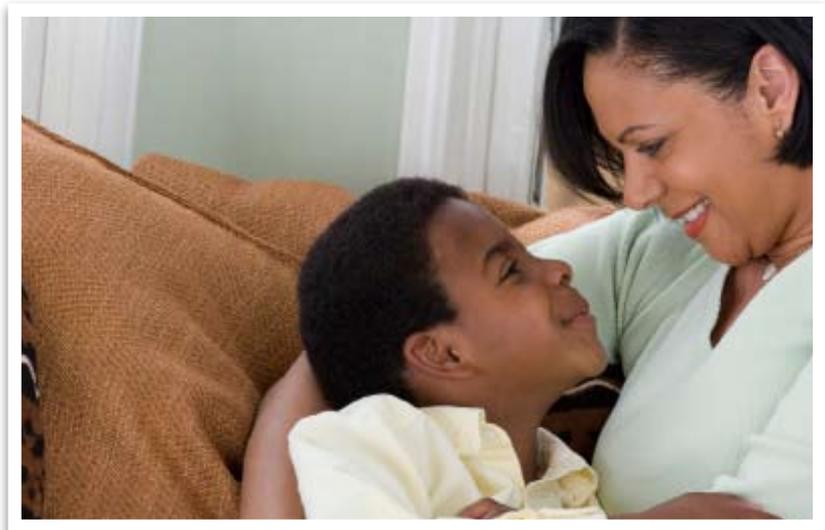
rotate backward on its axis. Never before had this boy cleaned himself up without complaining about it, not just once, but *twice* in one day. There was more to this Forgettery than I thought.

I, too, have a Forgettery, and I'm ashamed to admit that I've used it on more than one occasion. "Did you sew that button on my suit pants?" my husband asks.

"I'm sorry, honey, I guess I forgot," I say. "You know, with all I've got going on...kids, school, cooking, cleaning..." He shakes his head and walks away, wearing his suit pants minus a back pocket button. He isn't buying it, and I shouldn't be selling it.

The Forgettery might seem handy at the time, but it usually ends up biting your backside. With my kids, it's 50 cents and a mild word of reminder. With me, just knowing I've let someone down is punishment enough.

When we forget grievances, hurts, and disappointments, we find others more willing to overlook our own shortcomings.



their chores is a good way to make responsible citizens of them.)

But every once in a while, the Forgettery works in my favor. One weekend, my older son took a shower in the early afternoon after mowing the lawn, with the understanding that he could skip his usual evening bath. For him, showering and smelling clean are not yet high priorities. I can count on more than one hand the times I had to do a "sniff" test and then send the offender back to the shower to do it over again.

This time, though, he forgot that he had already showered and ended up taking another one. I almost expected the sun to stand still and the earth to

The Forgettery of forgiveness

But aren't there things, biblically speaking, that we *should* forget? Like when somebody offends us, or is less than considerate to us, or lets us down in some way?

When it comes to the Forgettery, I guess, the real issue is what you put there. When we forget grievances, hurts, and disappointments, we find others more willing to overlook our own shortcomings. I'm hoping my button incident is lost deep in my husband's Forgettery. Which means that I have to drop his dirty-socks-on-the-floor incident in my Forgettery.

God has a Forgettery, too. Psalm 103:12 describes

it this way: “He has removed our rebellious acts as far away from us as the east is from the west.”

I’m reminded of Edmund, in C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Although Edmund had betrayed his siblings and fallen prey to the White Witch, Aslan made certain to let Edmund know his betrayal was forgotten. “Here is your brother,” Aslan said to Peter, Susan, and Lucy, “and there is no need to talk to him about what is past.”

Most of the time, our hurts and disappointments are not of the magnitude inflicted by Edmund on his brother and sisters. They’re more of the daily irritations that come from people living with people.

Sometimes the hurts we suffer are hard to forget. If Peter, Susan and Lucy were real people, I’m sure they would have had trouble forgetting what their brother had done to them. Even though God completely forgets our sins, forgetting is not so easy for us, whether it’s damage we’ve suffered at the hands of others or guilt over our own past.

I take comfort in Paul’s words: “Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for

which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven” (Philippians 3:13b-14, *New Living Translation*). We aren’t alone in our struggles to forget things that need to be forgotten. The trick Paul reveals is that not only can we forget, but we can also look forward to what lies ahead—“I keep working toward *that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be*” (verse 12, italics mine).

So the idea of a Forgettery isn’t such a bad one. (After all, God himself has one—a totally righteous and awesome one.) The key is what you put in it. If my husband forgets that I forgot to sew a button on, and if I forget how he forgot to pick up his socks, well, that might just help reduce the friction between us that comes from living together. And it might give just a little taste of what it will be like when we’re all that Jesus wants us to be. ☪



Nan Kuhlman is a member of the Fort Wayne, Indiana, WCG congregation. She lives in Defiance, Ohio, with her husband and three children. When she’s not homeschooling her kids, she enjoys writing for a local women’s magazine.

“Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven.”

In Other Words

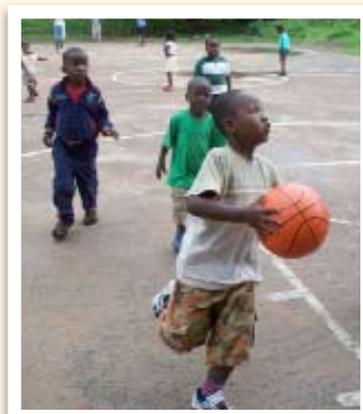
“Mvula ikakuona lisilo sikhata.”

By Kalengule Kaoma

A friend from the Chewa tribe taught me a proverb from the Eastern Province in Zambia that goes like this: “*Mvula ikakuona lisilo sikhata.*” A literal translation of this Chichewa proverb is: “Rain sees dirty won’t stop.” It means, “The rain won’t stop until it washes you clean.”

I was intrigued by the beauty of the idea of attributing sight to the rain. The sense behind it, of course, is that we can be like rain with eyes. When we see something that needs doing, we can stay with it until the job is done. For example, one of the many ways the Chewa tribe uses the saying is to express the way the elders, when confronted with a problem, will not rest until they find a solution.

As I write, I am attending an annual regional church youth camp. This is a time when we present young people with various challenges, pushing them to work their muscles and minds to build



stamina and determination. We encourage them to see their problems and challenges as opportunities to find answers.

Wherever we see potential in campers, we make every effort to help them learn how to exercise it. When we see a glimmer of talent, skill or good desire, we gently and persistently encourage it. Some campers excel right away; others take a bit longer. But instructors and group counselors never stop helping each camper move toward the next level. Each person has challenges, but in the spirit of the Chichewa saying, we don’t write off anyone,

but rather, we keep working with them until they reach their goal.

When “rain sees dirty, it won’t stop raining.” And when you and I see something worth doing, we can be like rain with eyes, not stopping until we see and taste the pleasant fruit of our efforts. ☪

“I Preached the Sermon on the Mount”

By Ken Slade

Israel. Golan Heights. Syria. Lebanon. These are the modern names of some of the places surrounding Capernaum, the base area from which Jesus Christ ministered almost 2,000 years ago. It's an area that today—as then—bristles with military tension and the ever-present potential of terrorist activity. Hardly the world of peace Jesus preached about!

“These words of Jesus on this mount are not religious. If only all mankind would listen to them and live by them, the world would have peace.”

It's not number one on most tourist itineraries, either. Yet here we were, an oddly mixed busload of 28 people from several nations.

Our cheerful, confident Israeli tour guide, Reuben, had already demonstrated a flare for re-creating the “feel” of historical events in his beloved homeland. A few days earlier, as we looked down from the dizzying heights of the fortress Masada upon the remnants of surrounding Roman encampments, Reuben had excited our imaginations with the impassioned exhortation of the zealous Jewish leader who encouraged 1,000 of his followers to embrace death rather than Roman desecration in A.D. 73.

The words from Masada live on in local history books, but the wider world has not felt their power. Jesus' words, on the other hand, rippled across the nearby Sea of Galilee, and across the centuries have

communicated an attracting power that draws to Israel many thousands of people from all nations every year, despite the continuing visible presence of military forces prepared for immediate deployment.

After we had climbed the mount by the Lake of Galilee, our guide asked—with an amazing theatrical talent to tease us—if we had ever seen a Jew carrying a New Testament Bible. No? His hand slid into his backpack and withdrew a black leather book.

“These words of Jesus on this mount are not religious,” Reuben stated boldly. “If only all mankind would listen to them and live by them, the world



Sea of Galilee

would have peace.”

There was silence on the mount as these words hit our consciences. Standing in a land engulfed for so long by war and violence, we struggled to deal with the impact of Jesus' vision of peace.

I was standing nearest our guide. He thrust the shiny black book at me. “I want you to read Matthew chapter 5 to us all,” Reuben said. “It will explain why I brought you here.”

I read,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (verses 3-10).

These eternal truths floated quietly from the printed page to the hearts of my companions. Our attention was riveted on the simplicity of the message.

Reuben was right. He wants peace for all people. The

words of peace I had repeated to a busload of 21st-century tourists had begun to turn the world upside down nearly two millennia ago. They had offered hope to an oppressed people.

They still do when one is bold enough to trust the author of eternal life and let him live from within our hearts.

“Hey, Ken!” called out Stephen, a South African member of our tour group. “I got it all on my tape recorder. They’ll never believe this when they hear it back home—Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount with an Aussie accent!” ☪



Ken Slade lives in Bendigo, Victoria, Australia.

I’ve Been Reading...

Theistic Evolution

Another way of looking at the ongoing debate

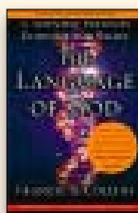
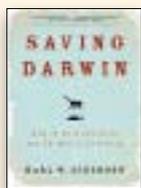
Reviewed by John Halford

In the course of coordinating the material for our main article in this issue (page 5), I realized that I was fairly familiar with the ideas behind Creationism (both “young” and “old” earth) and also Intelligent Design. I also had read, and firmly rejected, the case for atheism. But friends who are scientists told me of a fourth alternative: Theistic Evolution. I didn’t know much about it, and I suspect you don’t either.

Theistic Evolutionists believe in a Creator God, but also endorse evolution as an explanation for the development of life. Many believing scientists hold this position, and the argument is well thought out. Here are a few books that have helped me understand what Theistic Evolution is all about. They might not answer all your questions, but they will get you thinking.

Saving Darwin, by Karl W. Giberson (Harper One, 2008). Giberson, Professor of Physics at a Christian college, traces his own journey from creationism to an acceptance of the current theory of evolution. He shows that Christianity and evolution do not have to be incompatible. The book is easy to read, and it is an excellent introduction to the subject.

Can You Believe in God and Evolution?, by Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett (Abingdon, 2006). This is another easy-to-read introduction to the ideas behind Theistic Evolution. The book is subtitled “A Guide for the Perplexed,” and it calmly sorts through the rhetoric and often volatile emotions that tend to cloud the debate. Peters and Martinez set out to answer the questions the average person has, avoiding jargon and technical language. I think pastors and teachers will find this short book (90 pages plus notes and glossary) particularly helpful. It has been named a “book of distinction” by the prestigious Templeton Foundation.

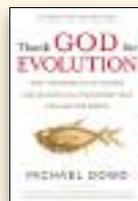


faith in God. It gets a bit technical in places, but you’ll come away with a greater appreciation of what it means to be “fearfully and wonderfully made.”

God and Evolution, by Daniel Samson (Solon Publishing, 2006). This is a big book (544 pages) by a former fundamentalist pastor who, after being confronted by questions his church education left him unable to answer, spent 14 years in intensive study of evolution and creationism. Samson came away from his research with his understanding of evolution transformed and his faith in God intact. Many of our readers will identify with Samson’s background and might find this book particularly informative.

Thank God for Evolution, Michael Dowd (Viking, 2008). Another “big” book and I’m still reading it, so regard this review as a work in progress. Dowd explains why the bitter controversy between science and religion is unnecessary. Far from being a threat to belief, he explains why an understanding of the process of evolution will actually enhance and intensify your appreciation of what God has done and is doing.

The above is just a small selection of what is available. Theistic Evolution is an idea that is catching on, and if you are interested in the creation/evolution debate, these books will help you understand what is being said. ☪



Paul's Farewell Letter

A study of 2 Timothy 1

By Michael Morrison

During the reign of Emperor Nero, the apostle Paul was placed on “death row” in a Roman prison. Although he had been released from prison several times before, Paul now senses that death will be his only escape. He writes his last letter to the man who had worked with him the longest. He encourages Timothy to continue his work.

Paul begins by explaining who he is: **Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.**

Timothy already knows this, so why does Paul include it? He probably wants Timothy to see himself in similar terms: appointed by the will of God and promised life in Christ. Timothy should not view his work as optional, and even if officials threaten to kill him, he needs to remember that life is guaranteed in Christ, not in the Empire.



Timothy need not be ashamed, nor afraid of prison and death, because he knows that Christ is faithful—we can trust our lives to him, and he'll keep every promise he has made.

To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. By calling Timothy his “dear son,” Paul sets a tone of affectionate advice.

Be bold with the gospel (verses 3-7)

Paul begins with indirect praise: **I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.** Paul gives God the credit for all the good that he sees in Timothy, and he assures Timothy that he is praying for him. He mentions his “clear conscience”—something he wants Timothy to have, too.

Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. We do not know what the tears were about—perhaps Timothy's sorrow at leaving Paul, thinking that it might be the last time they would see each other.

Paul reminds Timothy of his roots: **I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.** Paul wants Timothy to continue in this same path.

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. Since you have faith, Paul says, put it to use. 1 Timothy 4:13-14 implies that Timothy's “gift” was preaching the gospel. And as we continue reading this letter, we see that this is what Paul wants him to do.

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. Don't shrink back, Paul says—be bold. God gives us what we need: strength, love for others, and self-discipline. When it comes to the gospel, many people have a spirit of timidity, but timidity is not from God. So we might need to pray for strength, or love, or self-discipline. All of these come from God.

Was Timothy timid? Paul's words might simply be a rhetorical strategy. He had sent Timothy on several difficult missions; it seems that Paul was confident in Timothy's ability and willingness. He wanted to encourage him to continue the good work he was already doing.

Don't be ashamed of suffering (verses 8-12)

Since God gives us what we need, **do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner.** Most people *would* be ashamed: Paul was on death row for telling people that Jesus, not Nero, was Lord and King. Jesus had been executed as an enemy of the Empire, and Paul seemed headed for that, too. Timothy had helped Paul spread his message.

But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God... You will suffer for doing it, but God will give you the help you need.

And then Paul reminds Timothy of what the gospel is, and why he should preach it: God **has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.** The word *holy* means “set apart for God.” God not only gives us eternal life, he tells

us that our life has purpose—we are set apart for God’s use.

This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. Even before God created us, he knew that we would need a Savior, and he forgave us ahead of time.

Although the plan for salvation was in place all along, people didn’t know about it until Christ came. He defeated our worst enemy, death, and gave us the good news of eternal life. **And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.** Timothy already knows Paul’s commission, but Paul says it here because it applies to Timothy, too. He is passing the baton to someone who will continue the work. The job is larger than anyone can do, so part of the job is recruiting, training, and passing it along to others.

The message is good news, and yet it is not always accepted as good. **That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.**

Timothy has also been appointed as someone who should testify about Christ and the immortality Christ has revealed. Timothy need not be ashamed, nor afraid of prison and death, because he knows that Christ is faithful—we can trust our lives to him, and he’ll keep every promise he has made.

Keep the treasure safe (verses 13-18)

After explaining his own commission and commitment, Paul then addresses Timothy more directly: **What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.** I did it—now you do it. Don’t change the message—repeat it.

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who

lives in us. The “good deposit” is the message of salvation, and it is preserved with the help of God’s Spirit. Paul is not explaining doctrine—he is creating a motivational message, mixing commands, personal testimony, and assurance to help Timothy carry on without him.

Paul then refers to his own situation in Rome: **You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.** These men didn’t necessarily desert Christ, but they were afraid to help Paul in his most recent troubles.

In contrast to them, Paul praises someone who was not afraid: **May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.** Onesiphorus had helped Paul in prison, and now Paul asks God to help his family. Was he still alive? We do not know.

On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. This is an example that Timothy might need to copy when he comes to Paul (4:21).

May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! Did Paul think that he needed to ask God to show mercy to a loyal worker? No; Paul is playing on words: Just as Onesiphorus *found* Paul, Paul wants him to *find* mercy. Paul knows that the Lord *will* give him mercy, because the Lord is full of mercy, and it has already been granted, even before time began. Nothing can change that. ☪

Taking it personally

- Is there someone for whom I frequently thank God? (v. 3)
- Has God given me a gift that I should fan into flame? (v. 6)
- Am I embarrassed by the gospel? (v. 8)
- Am I willing to be embarrassed by the gospel?
- How does the Holy Spirit help me guard the gospel? (v. 14)

The Greeks Had a Word for It

“Συνείδησις”

The Greek word *syneidēsis* first meant to be aware of something, to be conscious of something. 1 Peter 2:19 uses it in that sense, referring to a person who “is conscious of God”—aware of his existence.

But *syneidēsis* came to be used primarily for self-awareness, especially beliefs that one’s actions are right or wrong: the con-

science. People can have a good conscience, thinking that they have done right (2 Tim. 1:3), or a bad conscience, believing that they have done wrong (Heb. 10:22). The conscience can lack sensitivity (1 Tim. 4:2) or be overactive (1 Cor. 8:10-12).

The conscience not only evaluates past actions, but also considers whether future actions are right.

Hmm...

Nothing was ever changed by people who cared merely about themselves! The world was made better only when ordinary people like you and me seriously invested their lives in the service of the wider community and the greater good.

Robert Frost

Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what it is still possible for you to do.

Pope John XXIII

Friendship is the source of the greatest pleasures, and without friends even the most agreeable pursuits become tedious.

Thomas Aquinas

No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible.

Voltaire

If there is a God, it's going to be a whole lot bigger and a whole lot more incomprehensible than anything that any theologian of any religion has ever proposed.

**Richard Dawkins,
Time interview, Nov. 2006**

It is better to be silent in perplexity and believe, than to disbelieve on account of the perplexity.

Athanasius

I advise you, dear friends, to beware of making yourselves out to be worse than you really are. There are some persons who could not do so if they tried; but there are others who, having been, by divine providence, brought up in the ways of godliness, have never gone into open sin as some of their fellows have done. They have been sinful enough, God knows, and as they

themselves will know when after years shall have shed more light on their character; but let them not try to mimic the expressions of persons of more advanced years. Do not call yourself "the chief of sinners" if you are not; and do not suppose that repentance means the exaggeration of your evil life into something more evil than it really was.

Charles Spurgeon

People turn to faith at times of shared anxiety, and rightly so. There is a marvelous Hebrew word, *bitachon*, which in modern Hebrew means physical security and in classical Hebrew means trust in the future. Right now we need both, and the second is what faith provides.

U.K. Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

I fear God, yet am not afraid of him.

Sir Thomas Browne

When one door of happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one that has been opened for us.

Helen Keller

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