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REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION



A BIBLE-BASED SURVIVAL GUIDE



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Astronauts pose for pictures outside the U.S. Capitol after a news conference about NASA's Artemis II mission (May 18, 2023).

DREW ANGERER/GETTY IMAGES

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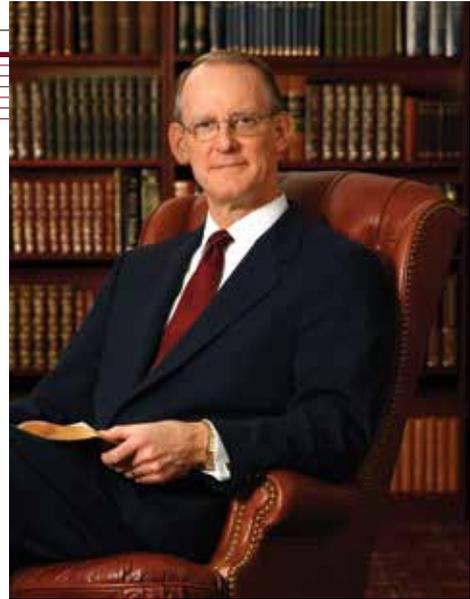
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Christ Came to Proclaim the True Gospel!

THE BIBLE could be summarized as a book about God and His *kingdom*. Yet very few truly understand either subject! Jesus Christ explained in Luke 16:16, “The law and the prophets were until John [only Old Testament scriptures had been preached previously]: *since that time* the kingdom of God is preached, and *every man presses into it*” (Luke 16:16). Do you know how to do this?

Everywhere Christ went, He preached “the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14). He, in fact, stressed that this is *why* He came to Earth! Notice Luke 4:43: “I must preach the kingdom of God...for therefore am I sent.” In addition to becoming Savior for all mankind, preaching THIS message was central to His purpose!

Yet God foretold that a burst of new prophetic knowledge would come before He intervened in world affairs (Amos 3:7). The picture of prophecy long understood in the Church has been greatly amplified over recent years in a largely internal series of sermons I have given titled “The Greatest Untold Story!”—now more than 500 in number. This under-

taking, led by God, has detailed how the kingdom will come to Earth. Every time you pray “Thy kingdom come,” you are asking God to do something He has been planning for millennia!

Our prophetic literature is largely correct, just *incomplete* in light of what God has shown. Because of this, we have begun the process of revisiting our materials to ensure they are up to date. My booklet *Which Is the True Gospel?* will be one of the first updated. I included an advance excerpt here...

Meaning of “Gospel”

The word *gospel* is an old English word meaning “god spell” or *good news*. The word *kingdom* is also an old English term, simply meaning “government.” Therefore, it is accurate to say that Christ preached “the good news of the government of God.” We will learn the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* of this good news, and how it relates to the Bible’s greatest prophecy.

The kingdom of God is the dominant theme of not only the New Testament, but of the whole Bible.

Yet, incredibly, most know little or nothing of it. This world's ministers are oblivious to this gospel, and never preach about it. Therefore, virtually the whole world stands in complete ignorance of the single greatest truth in God's Word!

How Many Times Mentioned?

The word *gospel* is found over 100 times in the Bible. Sometimes it is found alone, and sometimes "of the kingdom" follows it. Other times, it includes "of the kingdom of God," or the equivalent phrase "of the kingdom of heaven."

Note that it says, "of heaven," not "in heaven." It is heaven's kingdom, and there is a big difference between the two. Just as kingdom of God means God's kingdom—not the kingdom in God—the same is true of the kingdom of heaven or *heaven's kingdom*.

Grasp this crucial point!

Throughout the New Testament, the word "kingdom" is found 27 times, "kingdom of God" 75 times, and "kingdom of heaven" 34 times. All are clearly one and the same.

What Paul Preached

Paul preached the kingdom of God to the gentiles. Yet, some believe that he preached a "different" gospel—again, unaware that it was Paul who pronounced a curse on anyone who did this (Gal. 1:8-9). However, while Paul preached the kingdom of God, notice two verses in Acts showing that he did not neglect the subject of Christ's role in the salvation process.

First, Acts 19:8 establishes which gospel he preached: "And he went into the synagogue, and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the *kingdom of God*." In many of his epistles, he taught the kingdom to Gentile congregations. His message was always the same. He continually preached, taught and referred to the *kingdom of God*.

Next, Paul states in Acts 20:25, 21, "I have gone preaching *the kingdom of God*...repentance toward God, AND *faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*." He

preached the same gospel to both Jew and Gentile.

Now notice Acts 28:30-31: "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, AND *teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ*."

Luke, the writer of Acts, differentiates between preaching about the *kingdom of God* and preaching about *Jesus Christ*! While both are vitally important, they are clearly two *separate* subjects!

"Paul wanted the Corinthians to reject false teachers and hold to what he had taught them. The point here is that Paul distinguishes between the teaching of a false Jesus and that of a false gospel."

In Acts 8:12, the deacon Philip also preached both of these same teachings: "But when they believed Philip... concerning the kingdom of God, AND the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." We see that Philip not only preached the kingdom of God, but he also differentiated it from the teaching *about* Christ.

Notice that these in Samaria were baptized only after "they believed" the right message—not some human idea about it. Also, Christ's name was taught as an all-important, but additional, understanding.

Jesus is *not* the gospel. However, He does stand directly *alongside* the true gospel and *will* rule the entire earth when He returns and establishes His kingdom. Do not lose sight of this!

Finally, consider another verse where Paul himself made a distinction between the *gospel* and the *person* of Christ. II Corinthians 11:4 contains this powerful warning: "For if he that comes preaches *another Jesus*, whom we have not preached...or *another gospel* which you have not accepted, you might well bear with him" (the margin more correctly renders this last phrase "with *me*"). Paul wanted the Corinthians to reject false teachers and hold to what *he* had taught them. The point here is that Paul distinguishes between the teaching of a *false Jesus* and that of a *false gospel*. These are—and always have been—two separate things.

Some get confused when they read I Corinthians 15:1-4, thinking that Paul contradicts himself from other passages we have seen by stating that "the gospel" (vs. 1) is "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day" (vs. 3-4). Simply note that "the gospel" reference in verse 1 is not connected to Christ's death for our sins and burial in verses 3 and 4. Careful reading reveals this. When correctly understood, rather than saying that Christ is the gospel, this passage confirms the opposite, and supports Acts 8:12, 20:21-25, 28:31 and II Corinthians 11:4!

Since Jesus preached "repent and believe the gospel," it should now be clear why. His role must always be preached in conjunction with the kingdom of God, because one cannot enter the kingdom unless he understands and accepts that "Christ died for our sins," and that person has repented of his sins.

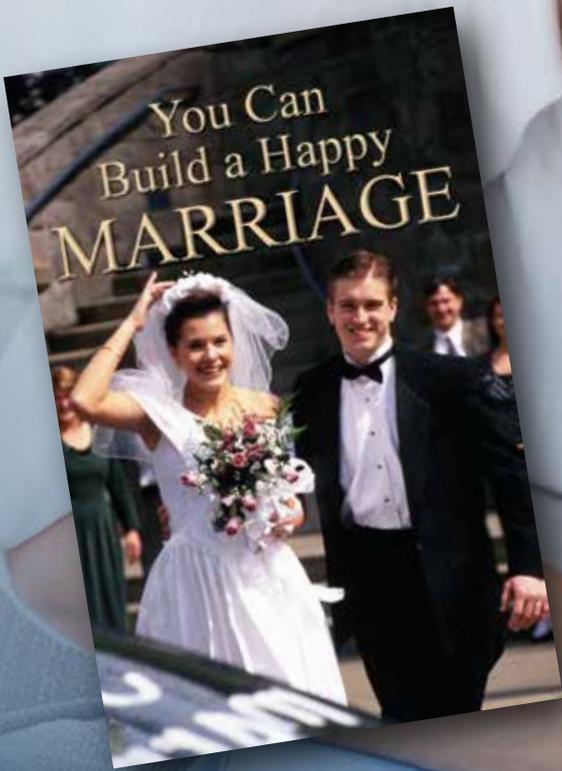
Ask yourself: If Christ is the gospel—is the kingdom of God—then why did Paul (four times) and Philip speak of them *as two separate matters*?

All the Apostles Preached This Same Gospel

What evidence is there that other New Testament writers preached this same message? A great deal!

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 30

Lasting Happiness Is Possible!



With divorce so common in today's society, the idea of "growing old together" with a spouse can seem like a fairy tale. Yet the Bible provides bedrock, time-tested principles that—if applied—can ensure your marriage lasts and is filled with joy. Read the booklet *You Can Build a Happy Marriage* at rcg.org/ycbahm to ensure you and your spouse keep your vows for life.

THE **2024** PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION



**A BIBLE-BASED
SURVIVAL
GUIDE**



**BY SAMUEL
C. BAXTER**



God's Word reveals how to navigate the current political climate in the United States.

WILL AMERICA survive the 2024 presidential election? If you ask the candidates, the answer is maybe not. At least not in the form that we all know it.

The Democratic contender and current president, Joe Biden, said at a fundraiser in New York that he thinks “our democracy is at stake” in the current election.

The Republican candidate and former president, Donald Trump, said during a rally in Ohio, “If we don’t win this election, I don’t think you’re going to have another election in this country.”

So, if the other side wins, the Land of the Free and Home of the Brave will be no more.

You could dismiss this as political hyperbole—the candidates exaggerating to boost fundraising efforts and tear down their opponents—but this is heating up to be a presidential election like no other.

If you are like most, you are sick of it already. A September 2023 Pew Research poll found that 65 percent of Americans say they feel exhausted when thinking about politics. Also, 63 percent said they have “not too much” or “no confidence” at all in the future of the U.S. political system.

The researchers asked, “What one word or phrase would you use to describe politics in the U.S. these days?” The top responses showed the mood of the nation: Divisive. Corrupt. Messy. Bad. Chaos.

Many Americans are frustrated with the candidates on offer. Pew found that about 1 in 4 citizens have unfavorable views of *both* Joe Biden and Donald Trump.

So will the U.S. survive past November 5? The answer may often feel like no. However, unless God Himself comes and shakes up the world order, America will persist past this election cycle.

Despite this, you may be thinking, *But will I survive?*

As the days and weeks tick by, you need to brace yourself for more aggressive mudslinging and name-calling.

You need to get ready to navigate opinionated conversations with family and friends. You need surefire ways to stay sane in 2024.

Although leaders often force God and the Bible into politics as a cheap grab for votes, this Book does have a lot to say about how to navigate politics. It is filled with knowledge that can help you understand the confusing world around you—as well as how to weather the political maelstrom that comes every four years in the U.S.

Holding tight to the following Bible verses will help you endure the constant campaigning in 2024. Consider them your survival guide until Election Day and beyond.

God Selects Leaders

When studying a Bible topic, it is best to start with the clearest verses. These lay a foundation that helps you understand other scriptures that may be more difficult to grasp. One such verse about politics is found in Daniel 2:21, which states that God “removes kings, and sets up kings: He gives wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.”

While Americans—and everyone who votes around the world—may think they are helping to select leaders, it is really God who is in control. He sets up presidents, governors and congressmen. He removes them too.

Think about what this means. If there is a president in office you personally like, it was God who put him there. If you have a leader you do not like, it was God who put him there as well. You may not immediately see God’s purpose for selecting a man or woman, but Daniel 2:21 stands sure and fast. God decides who holds power—no one else.

Allow this Bible fact to anchor you. In the coming months, you will see so many people fretting about who will win the presidency. Yet you can know that whoever ultimately gains or retains power is within God’s purpose.

Another verse in Daniel adds to this by saying that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to

whomsoever He will, and sets up over it the *basest of men*” (4:17).

Take this at face value. Even the greatest leaders are considered “the basest of men.” This means the *lowest* of men. This starts to make sense when you think of the corruption, adultery and lies that so often accompany world leaders.

But how does this knowledge help you weather the presidential election? The answer comes from another basic verse.

Cannot Govern Self

Jeremiah 10:23 reveals an essential truth that God wants everyone to learn: “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps.”

Man CANNOT direct his steps. Human governments always tend toward disarray and ruin. Some last a few decades and others centuries, but all fail. They may have flashes of brilliance, periods of peace and even seem to triumph over evil from time to time—but that is just one side of the coin.

The other side is all the troubles and ills that come with manmade governments. Be honest. These systems of government do not work. They are ineffectual and broken.

Man has been on the same path from the beginning. In the Garden of Eden, the first human beings ate from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:17; 3:22). With this act, the first man and woman *took to themselves* the power to decide what was right or wrong rather than relying on God. Every individual has been doing the same ever since. The results are obvious.

Why would God do this? He is giving humanity the space and time to try out different forms of government and see that they do not work. This is the lesson Jeremiah learned—but so few understand today.

As this year’s election heats up, keep Jeremiah 10:23 in mind. It explains the political gridlock, unintended consequences and utter ineffectiveness of governments today.

This leads to an even bigger question: Should you be involved with politics at all?

Where God Wants Our Citizenship

Philippians 3:20 says this: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (New King James Version).

Those following God’s Way should consider their citizenship to be in heaven—not here on Earth. The original Greek word for “citizenship” is *polit-euma*. The root word of this is where today’s “politics” derives.

So Philippians 3:20 could instead read “our POLITICS are in heaven.” Instead of getting embroiled in the fighting between Republicans, Democrats and everyone in between, our politics should be with God.

Jesus made clear what this means when talking to Pontius Pilate: “My Kingdom is not of this world: if My Kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My Kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

Christ preached about a coming Kingdom. It will be a SUPERGOVERNMENT ruled by God that will bring peace and prosperity to the entire world. Isaiah 9:7 says that “the increase of His government and peace” will be never-ending.

Some think God’s Kingdom is already on Earth now. Yet would a government ruled by Almighty God look like any of the governing systems we see today? The answer is obvious.

Because Christ’s Kingdom has not yet come, Christians should not be engaged in politics in any way.

This understanding can seem odd at first. Yet it will quickly become an incredible stress reliever. It means you can rise above all the arguments and uncertainty because you trust that God is in control.

Honor the King

While God wants us to avoid political involvement, He does understand that

“WE SHOULD BE PRAYING FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE NATION IN WHICH WE LIVE.”

we still have to lead lives in this world. The Bible shows how we should conduct ourselves: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors...” (I Pet. 2:13-14).

We should follow all the laws of the land so long as they do not conflict with God’s commands. Thankfully, in the U.S., there are precious few decrees that fall into this category.

Verse 17 adds how we should treat others: “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. *Honor the king.*”

While leaders are the basest of men—with their failings often readily evident!—we should still submit to and honor them. Given today’s politicians, this can be a hard pill to swallow.

But let’s bring some historical context to Peter’s words. While he was writing this epistle, Nero—a man who ordered mass executions of Christians—was emperor in Rome. Yet God still considered this wicked leader deserving of honor!

If the first century apostles could give appropriate honor to Nero, we can definitely respect today’s leaders.

I Timothy 2 goes further and says we should even pray for those in power: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; FOR KINGS, and for ALL THAT ARE IN AUTHORITY; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (vs. 1-2).

What?! We should pray and give thanks for presidents and governors—even those doing things contrary to God’s Way?

Yes. But notice the reason for this: “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life.”

We should be praying for the success of the nation in which we live. Pray that the leaders will enact policies that allow us to lead godly, peaceful lives.

In the U.S., we are incredibly blessed to have sweeping freedom of religion. We should remain thankful for this and ask God to protect this right.

Praying for leaders also has another effect—especially for politicians you may find distasteful or repugnant. Going to God on their behalf can help humanize and soften your view of them. Such acts can relieve any anger or frustration you may feel about the nation’s direction.

Trust that God Is in Charge

Prayer has an even bigger role to play in surviving the 2024 election cycle. It will help you apply Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct Your paths.”

We must not lean on our “own understanding”—what we personally think is right. Instead, we should trust in what God says and is doing here on Earth.

Psalms 20:7 states it this way: “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.”

When things seem bleak for the nation and the entire world, remember to trust God: “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You” (Psa. 56:3, NKJV).

Pray these words even before you are fearful—and call on them when you do find yourself in a tough spot.

Avoid Arguments

We have already seen we should pray to lead peaceful lives. We should apply the same principle to our day-to-day interactions. Romans 12 states, “If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men” (vs. 18).

When politics are on people’s minds, arguments come soon after. The 2024 election is sure to be no different. So many are absolutely sure their posi-

tion is correct and are ready to pick a fight at the drop of a hat.

James 1:19 tells us to “be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” If we listen to a person’s viewpoint and are careful before we respond, most political fights will never materialize.

If you have a co-worker or friend who insists on bringing up politics, be “swift to hear.” Listen to their perspective. Try your best to understand where they are coming from. This will help deepen your relationship with them rather than cause needless division.

Proverbs 18:13 also applies: “He that answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame unto him.” So does Proverbs 15:1: “A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”

Whatever you do when politics comes up, *do not* start quoting Bible principles back at them: “Did you know God selects leaders and calls them the basest of men?” “When Adam and Eve ate from the wrong tree...” “My politics are in heaven, don’t you know?”

Instead, only bring up such things if asked, as I Peter 3:15 instructs. It says we should “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.”

We should be ready to answer, yes. But *only* if asked. Otherwise, do not bring up Bible truths. Inserting your beliefs into a political argument is a surefire way to turn it into a religious one. This is the opposite of living peaceably with everyone.

What Else to Do

As political nonsense crescendos over the coming weeks and months, remember that God selects leaders, that man cannot truly govern himself and that your politics should remain in heaven. You should honor and pray for government leaders, not be involved with politics, trust in God and avoid political debates.

Instead of incessantly worrying about what is happening in human-

led governments today, you should confidently look forward to God’s coming Kingdom.

That is why it is a part of the model prayer in Matthew 6:10: “Your Kingdom come. Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

As things get worse in the here and now, pray that God’s Kingdom will come soon. Yet also ask that God’s will be done in the nation and in your own life.

To better pray “Your Kingdom come,” you need to know what that SUPERGOVERNMENT will look like when it arrives. Read *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* at rcg.org/tww for the Bible picture of what God says is coming soon.

Putting all these verses together will help you survive—and even thrive—during the tumultuous 2024 presidential election cycle. As the nation is wracked with uncertainty and division, you can be a beacon of peace. □



Left, former President Donald Trump arrives for a rally in Green Bay, Wisconsin (April 2, 2024). Right, President Joe Biden delivers remarks at the YMCA Allard Center in Goffstown, New Hampshire (March 11, 2024).

LEFT, SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT, KYLE MAZZA/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

FOR YEARS, Syria's civil war has been a largely frozen conflict, the country effectively carved up into areas controlled by the Damascus government of President Bashar Assad, various opposition groups and Syrian Kurdish forces.

But as the conflict entered its 14th year in March, observers say violence has been on the rise again while the world's attention is mostly focused on other crises, such as Russia's onslaught on Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

In the village of al-Nayrab in the northwestern, opposition-held enclave of Idlib, Ali al-Ahmad burns olive branches in a stove to keep his partially destroyed house warm.

He has been living in the damaged house, struck in a recent round of shelling by government forces. Still, it is in better condition than many of the surrounding houses that were reduced to rubble. When a new round of bombing starts, Mr. al-Ahmad leaves for a while to stay in one of the nearby displacement camps until the situation calms and he can return and repair the damage.

"We return for a day or two, then they start shelling us," he said. "We leave for a few days, then return to our village to find our homes destroyed."

The UN-backed body known as the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria said that since October, the country has seen the worst wave of violence since 2020.

The war, which has killed nearly half a million people and displaced half the country's pre-war population of 23 million, began as peaceful protests against Mr. Assad's government in March 2011.

The protests—part of the Arab Spring popular uprisings that spread across much of the Middle East that year—were met by a brutal crackdown, and the revolt quickly spiraled into a

People ride their motorcycle by damaged buildings in the old town of Homs, Syria (Aug. 15, 2018).

AP/SERGEI GRITS





SYRIA

A FORGOTTEN WAR



Top, Syrian Democratic Forces fighters guard men evacuated from the last territory held by Islamic State militants, near Baghouz, eastern Syria (Feb. 22, 2019). Bottom left, anti-Syrian government protesters flash victory signs in the southern city of Daraa, Syria (March 23, 2011). Bottom right, Syrian government forces carry a national flag as they walk by a checkpoint near the town of Tal Tamr, north Syria (Oct. 22, 2019).

TOP, AP/FELIPE DANA; BOTTOM LEFT, AP/HUSSEIN MALLA; BOTTOM RIGHT, AP/BADERKHAN AHMAD



full-blown civil war, which was further complicated by the intervention of foreign forces on all sides of the conflict, as well as a rising militancy, first by al-Qaida-linked groups and then the Islamic State group until its defeat in 2019.

Russia, along with Iran, became Mr. Assad's biggest ally in the war, Turkey backed an array of Syrian opposition groups while the United States supported Syrian Kurdish forces in the fight against IS. Israel has carried out airstrikes targeting the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and Iranian forces in Syria.

Over the years, the battlefields became stalemated in the war-ravaged nation.

The recent surge in violence began with a drone strike on a military academy graduation ceremony in the government-held city of Homs in October that killed dozens.

The Syrian government and allied Russian forces then launched a bombardment of the opposition-held northwest that hit "well-known and visible hospitals, schools, markets and camps for internally displaced persons," the commission said.

Elsewhere, increasingly frequent Israeli strikes targeted Iran-linked targets in government-held parts of Syria—attacks that sometimes also hit civilians. Turkey stepped up its attacks on U.S.-backed Kurdish forces in northeastern Syria, while militants from IS sleeper cells have launched sporadic attacks in different parts of the country.

Recently, opposition-held areas have also seen unrest, with protests breaking out in Idlib against the leadership of the al-Qaida-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group that governs the area.

With all the multiple and complex layers of the conflict, there is no resolution of the crisis in sight for Syria.

David Carden, the UN's Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria crisis, said during a recent visit to northwest Syria that the UN's humanitarian response plan for 2023, which had appealed for more than \$5 billion, only received 38 percent of the funds sought—the lowest level since the United Nations started issuing the appeals.

“There are 4.2 million people in need in northwest Syria, and 2 million of those are children,” of whom 1 million are not going to school, he said. “This is a lost generation.”

Compounding Syria's misery was the devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake on February 6, 2023, that killed more than 59,000 people in Turkey and Syria. Some 6,000 of them were killed in Syria alone, mainly in the northwest, where most of the 4.5 million people rely on humanitarian aid to survive.

United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations have been struggling to fund programs that provide a lifeline in Syria, blaming donor fatigue, the COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts elsewhere that have erupted in recent years.

The UN's World Food Program, which estimates that over 12 million Syrians lack regular access to food, announced in December that it would stop its main assistance program in Syria in 2024. □



Top left, Abu Mohammed al-Golani, the leader of Syria's al-Qaida affiliate, second from right, discusses battlefield details with field commanders over a map, in Aleppo, Syria. Top right, Syrian Democratic Forces fighters prepare for battle against Islamic state group militants (June 22, 2017). Bottom, a large refugee camp on the Syrian side of the border with Turkey, near the town of Atma, in Idlib province, Syria (April 19, 2020).

TOP LEFT, MILITANT UGC VIA AP; TOP RIGHT, AP/HUSSEIN MALLA; BOTTOM, AP/GHAITH ALSAYED



Get Your Prayers Answered

BY EDWARD L.
WINKFIELD

People pray to get
what they want.
Success requires
knowing how to
approach God.

A MAN ASKED Jesus Christ, “Teach us to pray,” in Luke 11:1. This request can seem strange given that prayer had been a widespread practice for thousands of years.

It remains common today, with a Pew Research poll finding that 77 percent of adults pray, half doing it at least once a day. Daily prayer is common across various religions, with 90 percent of Jehovah’s Witnesses, 85 percent of Mormons, 80 percent of Black Protestants and 79 percent of Evangelicals doing so. Even 20 percent of people with no religious affiliation—aka nones—engage in daily prayer.

Despite such widespread practice, most faiths do not offer guidance on how to appeal to God. How can we know we are doing it correctly?

Some of us learned to pray by observing older family members as a child or while attending church for the first time. Others settled on prayer practices based on devout characters on television, in movies or in books. The rest of us just did our best, all the while hoping that our prayers would be answered.

Yet Jesus’ answer in Luke 11 showed there is a *right* way to entreat God. Knowing that answer can change your life. It reveals there is a way to pray that gets you what you want and a way that does not.

This idea of right versus wrong prayer was at the heart of the man’s request to Christ.

When it comes to prayer, you do not have to just kneel and hope for the best. Instead, you can go to the source—God through His Word—and learn exactly how to ensure your prayers are answered.

Foundations of Prayer

Prayer is a personal dialogue with God, based on faith in His existence and the confidence that He will respond (Heb. 11:6). Prayer involves genuine reflective time with our Creator.

Knowing *how* to pray in a way that is pleasing to God is important.

Many see prayer as a self-serving tool. When not taught any better, they reduce God to a divine genie waiting to grant them their every wish. On the opposite end of the spectrum are those who pray, wondering if their prayers bounce off the ceiling, never reaching their intended audience.

Take a moment to consider your current prayers, including your motivations and the words you choose. Knowing this, how well do your supplications resemble the following?

In Matthew 6, a parallel account of Luke 11, Jesus taught His disciples how to pray: “When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward” (vs. 5).

Jesus started with an example of people praying the *wrong* way to establish how to do it properly. Even 2,000 years ago people picked up many bad habits when it came to talking to God. Today is no different.

Christ continued: “But you, when you pray, enter into your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father which is in secret; and your Father which sees in secret shall reward you openly” (vs. 6).

This shows that prayer is personal and should usually be kept confidential. While there are occasions when praying with others is appropriate, such as during a Church service, before a family meal at home or a cou-

ple praying with each other or their children, prayers are usually meant to be done in private.

With few exceptions, we should not pray in public where others can see and hear.

You may be surprised by this but remember Jesus said the point of prayer is not to “be seen of men.” It is not that we should be embarrassed about our faith, it is just that prayer should be an intimate exercise.

If our goal is for others to see us as godly based on our public, demonstrative prayers, then we are seeking rewards from people and not from God.

Truly ask yourself: Am I praying or telling people of my prayer habits to impress them? If so, try a different approach and focus on what God thinks, not others.

Resuming in verses 7-8, Christ said: “When you pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not you therefore like unto them: for your Father knows what things you have need of, before you ask Him.”

First note that God says that even “heathen” or unbelievers pray. Just because people pray it does not mean they are necessarily close to God. Next note that God said not to repeat vain or empty words when talking to Him. This stands in stark contrast to *billions* in mainstream religions memorizing and repeating themselves while praying!

Remember, prayer is a personal conversation with our Creator. Imagine someone fully capable of coherent speech choosing instead to stutter and repeat himself constantly. You would eventually get fed up and not be interested in what they had to say.

Talking with God is no different. A person choosing to repeat themselves over and over is not pleasant for Him either.

Matthew 6:9-15 gives a general outline of prayer for those needing guidance. It is a *model* we can person-

alize and expand based on our specific circumstances or issues in our lives. Approach this model with caution, however, as merely reciting it word-for-word would violate the very principle of avoiding the “vain” or empty repetition Christ warned against.

Just as the Bible is a rich and diverse text that should be seen as God talking to us, we should be equally rich and diverse in our conversations with Him.

Besides being done privately, we should pray in a posture of surrender, following examples found in scripture. Psalm 95:6 says “let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD...”

In I Kings 8:54, Solomon knelt before God “with his hands spread up to heaven.” Other times, believers are described as prostrating or lying face down before God in prayer the way Abraham did in Genesis 17:1-3 or Moses and Aaron did in Numbers 20:6.

Of course, there are times when speaking with God in a kneeling or lying position is not possible, as it might draw unwanted attention. The Bible also gives plenty of examples of people communicating with God without assuming a specific posture.

Regardless of your position, when you pray, remember that you are entering God’s presence. When talking to Him, confidently ask for your needs and desires, as well as the needs and desires of others (Heb. 4:16). Most of all, your requests should reflect a desire for God’s will to be done, rather than your own. God’s knowledge, understanding and wisdom exceeds ours. He knows what is best.

Does God Answer All Prayers?

Should we expect all our prayers to be answered? On its face, Matthew 7:7-8 appears to say yes. Jesus stated, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened.”

While this verse suggests that *everyone* can get *whatever* they ask for, other verses explain that answered prayer is conditional.

Consider. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear” (59:2). Iniquity is a fancy word for sin or breaking God’s commands (I John 3:4).

When God hides His face from a person, it means He is not answering their prayers.

The apostle John wrote: “Now we know that God *hears not* sinners: but if any man be a worshiper of God, and does His will, him He *hears*” (9:31). A sinner is someone who habitually practices sin. A worshiper of God, however, is someone who puts Him and His ways first in their life.

God does not expect us to be perfect. Instead, He wants us to prioritize Him and do our best to turn away from bad things and ask His forgiveness when we occasionally misstep. Asking for forgiveness should be a part of our daily prayer (Matt. 6:12).

Isaiah wrote, “Seek you [all people—including sinners willing to change] the LORD while He may be found, call you upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (55:6-7).

God clearly desires to forgive our mistakes and answer our prayers. He is more than willing to give us what we want, but with conditions.

The condition for answered prayer is that we must obey God’s Word. This is counter to the common misconception that God is so forgiving and benevolent that He will always do what we ask, no matter how we behave toward Him. This is not the God of the Bible.

While we cannot earn His kindness or deserve His generosity, it is unreasonable to expect God to fulfill our requests without us doing our part.

As our divine Father, God always wants what is best for us. He motivates us to do the right things by setting a standard and rewarding us when we follow it. He plainly stated this approach to the ancient Israelite people as an example for Christians today: “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live” (Deut. 30:19).

“God clearly desires to forgive our mistakes and answer our prayers. He is more than willing to give us what we want, but with conditions.”

Choosing life leads to God answering our prayers.

This quid pro quo is built into the Matthew 7:7 promise: “Ask, and it shall be given you...” God will do His part so long as we do ours.

I John 3:22 confirms this by saying, “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, *because we keep His commandments*, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”

We do not receive something for nothing.

The Formula for Answered Prayer

We saw in I John 3:22 that receiving what we ask of God is based on commandment keeping. The excuse that

people use not to keep the commandments—that Christ nailed them to the cross—does not work since John wrote this about keeping the commandments *years* after Jesus’ death and sacrifice for mankind!

God rewards obedient children and chastises disobedient ones—both are acts of love. This should not surprise anyone with children or those who had good parents.

Resist any temptation to balk at the requirement to obey God. The Bible is blunt on the matter: “He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination” (Prov. 28:9).

Do not make it complicated: If you refuse to listen to God, He refuses to listen to you!

But the opposite is also true. God’s arms are open to help anyone willing to heed His instruction, regardless of their past. He is very forgiving and is eager to bless and answer the prayers of those prepared to change their ways and obey Him.

Yet there is another important condition for answered prayer. The apostle James used the word *fervent* to describe it. “The effectual *fervent* prayer of a righteous man avails much” (5:16). This takes answered prayer to the next level by combining obedience with genuine heartfelt sincerity.

Recall that Christ warned against using vain repetition. The Pharisees of Matthew 6 were criticized for their long prayers that sounded eloquent but lacked depth. Likewise, repeating empty words and phrases was another telltale sign of insincerity.

God wants us to thoughtfully pour our hearts out in prayer. He will answer the requests of obedient followers. If our prayers are sincere and follow the model given in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, then they are noteworthy to God.

To learn even more about how to give proper, effective prayers, read our article “The Keys to Dynamic Prayer,” which is available for free at rcg.org/tktdp. □

The Keys to *Dynamic Prayer*

1. Ask in faith

If you want God to answer your prayers, you must first believe that He exists and that He will hear you. That takes faith.

2. Be diligent

If a matter is important to you, do not pray about it just once. Come to God again and again, sincerely (Matt. 7:7-11).

3. Pray for God's will, not your own

Most pray selfishly. If you study God's Word daily, replacing your thoughts with His, you can understand what He wants.

4. Have a humble attitude

God will only listen to those who are teachable, humble and yielded to Him (Luke 18:9-14).

5. Keep God's Law

God listens to those who obey Him. The more you obey God, the more understanding He will give you.

6. Approach God with a clean conscience

Confess your sins before God. Repent and ask for His forgiveness. Christ's blood will cleanse you (1 John 1:9).

7. Be bold

God expects our prayers to be bold, full of confidence—in Him, not self. Otherwise, He will not listen.

8. Pray in detail

Your prayers should be like sweet-smelling incense to God (Rev. 5:8)—finely ground—specific and highly detailed.

Discover four more keys at
rcg.org/tktdp

WHO WILL CONQUER SPACE?

The race to the moon and beyond points to
a deeper truth about humanity.

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY





THIS YEAR started with a major lunar milestone. A spacecraft built and flown by Texas-based company Intuitive Machines landed near the moon's south pole in February. This was the first U.S. touchdown on the lunar surface in more than half a century and the first ever achieved by the private sector.

The landing of the uncrewed six-legged robot lander, dubbed Odysseus, capped a nail-biting final approach and descent in which a problem surfaced with the spacecraft's autonomous navigation system that required engineers on the ground to employ an untested workaround at the 11th hour.

Accomplishing the landing is “a major intermediate goal, but the goal of the mission is to do science, and get the pictures back and so forth,” said Thomas Zurbuchen, a former NASA science chief who oversaw creation of the agency's commercial moon lander program.

NASA, with several research instruments aboard the vehicle, hailed the landing as a significant achievement in its goal of sending a squad of commercially flown spacecraft on scientific scouting missions to the moon ahead of a planned return of astronauts there later this decade.

The United States is currently the only country ever to have sent humans to the lunar surface. But it is far from the only nation with ambitions to reach the moon and “do science.” Other powerful players—China, India, Russia and Japan—have also been making strides in their space programs and have robust plans for the coming years.

This is the new space race. Currently, this pursuit focuses mainly on the moon—but that is

just a steppingstone to further exploration on Mars and space in general.

Success means international scientific and diplomatic victories as well as control of vital resources.

Yet these are not the only factors fueling the space race. There is a deeper reason for the enduring desire of people and nations to make it to the moon and beyond.

What is behind man's fascination with space? And who will ultimately conquer it?

America's Plans

NASA's website describes its motivations this way: "NASA's future will continue to be a story of human exploration, technology, and science. We will go back to the Moon to learn more about what it will take to support human exploration to Mars and beyond...Our scientists will work to increase an understanding of our planet and our place in the universe."

Odysseus' arrival marked the first landing under NASA's Artemis lunar program, as the U.S. races to return astronauts to Earth's natural satellite before China lands its own crewed spacecraft there.

NASA aims to land its first crewed Artemis in late 2026 as part of long-term, sustained lunar exploration and a steppingstone toward eventual human flights to Mars. The initiative focuses on the moon's south pole in part because a presumed bounty of frozen water exists there that can be used for life support and production of rocket fuel.

A host of small landers such as Odysseus are expected to pave the way under NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services program, designed to deliver instruments and hardware to the moon at lower costs than the U.S. space agency's traditional method of building and launching those vehicles itself.

Yet leaning more heavily on smaller, less experienced private ventures comes with its own risks.

Earlier this year, the lunar lander of another firm, Astrobotic Technology,

suffered a propulsion system leak on its way to the moon shortly after being placed in orbit on January 8 by a United Launch Alliance Vulcan rocket. The malfunction of Astrobotic's Peregrine lander marked the third failure of a private company to achieve a lunar touchdown, following ill-fated efforts by companies from Israel and Japan.

Private sector players such as SpaceX and Blue Origin have made crewed space missions a priority. NASA plans to send astronauts to fly around the moon next year, and to land there in 2026. It is working to commercialize lunar deliveries by private businesses while the U.S. government tries to get astronauts back to the moon.

For now, the United States' ability to spend large sums and marshal supply chains gives it an advantage over China and other moon rivals—all to the end of gaining an increased understanding of the universe.

China

In December 2013, China's uncrewed Chang'e-3 made the world's first lunar soft landing since 1976. In January 2019, the also uncrewed Chang'e-4 landed on the far side of the moon, another first. Last year, China launched a three-person crew for its orbiting space station. It hopes to put astronauts on the moon before the end of the decade.

In 2020, a Chinese capsule returned to Earth from the moon with the first fresh lunar rock samples in more than 40 years. China's first manned space mission in 2003 made it the third country after the USSR and the United States to put a person into space.

China's space plans are linked to its rivalry with the United States as the world's two largest economies compete for diplomatic, political and military influence in Asia and beyond.

A white paper released by the nation titled "China's Space Program: A 2021 Perspective" provided further insight into its lunar ambitions. It stated, "The space industry will contribute more to China's growth as a whole, to global consensus and common effort with

regard to outer space exploration and utilization and to human progress."

China built its own space station after being excluded from the International Space Station, partly because of U.S. objections over the Chinese space program's intimate ties to the military. China and the United States are also considering plans for permanent crewed bases on the moon.

India

In 2023, India became the first country to land a spacecraft near the moon's south pole. In 2019, a software glitch had caused an Indian lander to crash on its lunar descent. So the \$75 million success in August brought widespread jubilation, with people cheering in the streets and declaring India's rise as a scientific superpower.

The success was seen as key to boosting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity before a crucial general election this year.

Indian scientists said that the next step is a manned lunar mission.

India has been pushing for a space program since the 1960s and aims to visit the International Space Station next year in collaboration with the United States.

New Delhi also sees victory in space as important in its rivalry with nuclear-armed neighbor China. Relations between India and China have plunged since deadly border clashes in 2020.

But India's space ambitions are not solely driven by competition. According to the website of the Indian Space Research Organization: "The space research activities were initiated in our country during the early 1960's, when applications using satellites were in experimental stages even in the United States. With the live transmission of Tokyo Olympic Games across the Pacific by the American Satellite 'Syncom-3' demonstrating the power of communication satellites, Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, the founding father of Indian space program, quickly recognized the benefits of space technologies for India.

"Dr. Sarabhai was convinced and envisioned that the resources in space



Top, Hitoshi Kuninaka (L), director-general of JAXA's Institute of Space and Astronautical Science, speaks during a press conference on the mission results of the Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM), in Tokyo (Jan. 25, 2024). Bottom, an image taken by a Lunar Excursion Vehicle 2 of a robotic SLIM rover on the moon.

TOP, KAZUHIRO NOGI/AFP; BOTTOM, DOSHISHA UNIVERSITY VIA AP



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have the potential to address the real problems of man and society.”

Russia

Last year, Russia's Luna-25 failed in its attempt to land in the same area of the moon that India reached. It came 47 years after the Soviets landed on the moon, and Russian scientists blamed that long break and the accompanying loss of space expertise for the recent failure.

The Soviets launched the first satellite in space in 1957 and put the first human in space in 1961. Still, Russia's program has struggled since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union amid widespread corruption and Western sanctions that have hurt scientific development.

Moscow is planning for another moon mission in 2027.

Russia's failures and the growing role of companies, such as Elon Musk's SpaceX, have cost Russia its once-sizeable niche in the lucrative global space launch market.

Just as India's success was seen as evidence of its rise to great power status, some have portrayed Russia's failure as casting doubt on its global influence and strength.

While Russia's space ambitions are undoubtedly linked to their standing in the world, they too have had a sense of something greater.

Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, a Russian rocket scientist who pioneered astronautics and is seen by some as the father of human spaceflight, once proclaimed: “Men are weak now, and yet they transform the Earth's surface. In millions of years their might will increase to the extent that they will change the surface of the Earth, its oceans, the atmosphere and themselves. They will control the climate and the solar system just as they control the Earth. They will travel beyond the limits of our planetary system; they will reach other Suns and use their fresh energy instead of the energy of their dying luminary” (*ad Astra Magazine*).

This speaks to man's desire to explore, conquer and control what he

does not understand. We will see later that Tsiolkovsky may have been more right about this than he ever knew.

Japan

Japan landed a spacecraft on the moon in January, an attempt at the world's first "pinpoint lunar landing." The milestone allowed Japan to enter an elite club previously occupied by only the United States, the Soviet Union, India and China.

In February, an unmanned lunar spacecraft had captured and transmitted data analyzing 10 lunar rocks, a Japan space agency official said.

The Smart Lander for Investigating Moon, or SLIM, used its multi-band spectral camera to study rock composition, and worked on examining lunar rocks, said Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency project manager Shinichiro Sakai.

A black-and-white photo transmitted soon after SLIM was reactivated showed the bumpy lunar surface, including six rocks. The craft eventually obtained data from 10 rocks altogether, all of which were given the names of dog breeds, such as "Akitainu," "Beagle" and "Shibainu."

"We are hoping that the rock analysis will lead us to the origin of the moon," Mr. Sakai said. By comparing the mineral compositions of moon rocks and those of Earth, they could find out if the rocks have common elements, he said. According to the "giant-impact" hypothesis, some believe the moon was formed as a result of the Earth colliding with another planet, and a smaller mass spinning off of them.

During an April visit to the White House by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, he and U.S. President Joe Biden announced that Japanese astronauts will participate in NASA moon missions, among other measures to strengthen ties between the two nations.

Mr. Biden said, "Those ties stretch up to the moon, where two Japanese astronauts will join future American missions, and one will become the

first non-American ever to land on the moon."

Learning where the moon really came from is a driver for Japan's moon ambitions. The truth about the moon's origin goes hand-in-hand with knowing who will ultimately conquer space.

The Glory of the Moon

The moon and outer space in general have a certain allure to human beings. While part of the reason for the new moon race is bragging rights among nations and the pursuit of resources, each of the major players also has a curiosity that runs deeper than that.

Where does this allure come from? The apostle Paul shed light on this in the Bible. He wrote in I Corinthians: "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differs from another star in glory" (15:40-41).

Paul acknowledged that the planets, sun, moon and stars each have a certain "glory" unique from one another. This glory attracts man to continue exploring and to try to understand what makes these bodies so glorious.

While there are still things left to discover about the planet on which we live, man has only scratched the surface of what lies in outer space.

According to *Strong's Concordance*, the Greek word for glory means "glory (as very apparent), in a wide application, dignity, honor, praise, worship."

This definition begins to reveal the connection between our fascination with celestial bodies and the Being who created them. Seeing the majesty of the sun, moon, stars and planets points our minds to "worship," whether we know it or not.

Psalm 19 reveals more about this glory: "The heavens declare the *glory of God*; and the firmament shows His handywork" (vs. 1). To understand all that this verse is saying, take note of the word "heavens" (plural) here. This

term encompasses more than meets the eye.

The Bible describes *three* heavens. God the Father and Jesus Christ live in the third heaven (II Cor. 12:1-2), which no living human has seen. It is where God's throne is situated. The second heaven is the great, vast universe of stars, planets, comets and other bodies in space (Psa. 8:3). The first heaven is the sky or air that surrounds the Earth, which we refer to as the atmosphere (104:12).

Each of these declares God's glory in its own way.

Beyond the Moon

Mankind does not want to stop with the moon. His appetite for conquest is even greater than this. In recent years, the goal of humans living on Mars has grown in popularity.

According to NASA, "Mars remains our horizon goal for human exploration because it is one of the only other places we know where life may have existed in the solar system. What we learn about the Red Planet will tell us more about our Earth's past and future, and may help answer whether life exists beyond our home planet.

"Like the Moon, Mars is a rich destination for scientific discovery and a driver of technologies that will enable humans to travel and explore far from Earth."

Decades ago, the notion of life surviving on Mars seemed farfetched. But this vision has now come to be embraced by many, bolstered by technological advancements and scientific discovery.

In 2023, *The Associated Press* reported: "Water may be more widespread and recent on Mars than previously thought, based on observations of Martian sand dunes by China's rover. The finding highlights new, potentially fertile areas in the warmer regions of Mars where conditions might be suitable for life to exist, though more study is needed."

SpaceX founder Elon Musk, who has long expressed a vision for getting human beings to the red planet, said:

“You want to wake up in the morning and think the future is going to be great—and that’s what being a space-faring civilization is all about. It’s about believing in the future and thinking that the future will be better than the past. And I can’t think of anything more exciting than going out there and being among the stars.”

Who Will Conquer?

Beyond revealing celestial bodies declare God’s own glory, the Bible also emphatically proclaims that God created all things.

Colossians 1:16 says, “By Him [God] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him.” Revelation 4 adds, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for You have created all things, and for Your pleasure they are and were created” (vs. 11).

The simple truth is that we do not need to examine lunar rocks to know the moon’s origin or arrive on Mars to grasp Earth’s past and future.

God created space, just as He created all things. He is also in control of who will hold power over it. God will not allow *anyone* to conquer space outside His purpose. Man can only go as far as He allows. And the Bible tells us exactly what God plans for this vast lunar expanse. It has everything to do with salvation.

Real Truth Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack addressed this in his book *The Awesome Potential of Man*. He wrote: “The incredible goal of a Christian is to be born into the Kingdom of God—to become a spirit being RULING under Christ, as a very Son of God. What could be more wonderful—more glorious!—for a Christian to look forward to?”

Many verses make plain that one becomes a spirit being at the resurrection of the dead (John 5:24-26; Rom. 6:3-5; I Thess. 4:13-18). This is far different from the belief about going to

heaven that most popular Christian churches teach.

Mr. Pack continues: “God will eventually share rulership of His entire creation with His Sons...Christ is merely the first of many Sons. The birth of a firstborn son does not preclude the birth of additional sons (and daughters) to that same family. I have two sons and am a firstborn son with a younger brother. My father was a second born son, having an elder brother and so on.

“Paul goes on to explain that God plans to give enormous power and authority to His Sons: ‘You have put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him’ (Heb. 2:8). This has not yet happened—but it will soon.

“When God says that ‘all things’ will be put under the feet of man, that is what He means! The vast universe, with all of its quadrillions of stars and one trillion galaxies, will be put under the authority of men who have been born into the Family of God. In fact, the Moffatt translation renders the Greek word for ‘all things’ as ‘the universe.’”

A Change to Spirit

God never intended the vast expanse of outer space to lie dormant. He plans to give it to “His sons.” Those who obey God will conquer space as a part of His Plan.

Romans 8 adds more: “We know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (vs. 22-23).

All Creation is figuratively groaning for God’s sons and daughters to be given power over it.

This applies to planet Earth, which has been damaged, polluted and stripped of resources, but also the vastness of space, which has not yet been used to support life.

When does this all happen? At the “redemption of our body”—salvation.

I Corinthians 15, where we learned about the “glory of the moon,” reveals more about what being changed to spirit is like. Teaching about terrestrial and celestial bodies was not actually Paul’s main point here. He only cited this knowledge to compare them to something even greater: the spirit bodies God’s children will receive at the resurrection.

As you read his longer explanation, realize that this magnificent reward can be **YOURS**.

Paul wrote, “Some man will say, How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?...God gives it a body as it has pleased Him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.

“It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body... As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, *we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*” (vs. 35, 38-44, 48-49).

Space will not be conquered by the wealthiest or most advanced nations or companies. While they will continue to make incremental progress, these efforts will not give today’s nations what they seek. God has promised space rule to those who obey Him, along with power over “all things” in His Family.

Who will conquer space? If you obey God, **YOU WILL!** □



5 Time-tested STRESS REMEDIES

A majority of Americans say they are more stressed out than ever. But there is hope...

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY

AN EPIDEMIC of high stress is impacting all generations of Americans, from boomers to Gen Z. In a recent survey conducted by Clever Real Estate, 61 percent of Americans said their stress levels are higher than ever. Fifty-five percent report that their level of stress prevents them from enjoying life.

The impact of stress on the human body is well-documented. It can cause or exacerbate chronic conditions like heart disease and high blood pressure. It can create the perfect storm for stroke and heart attack. It can also

cause digestive issues and weaken the immune system, as well as contribute to insomnia, obesity and mental health issues.

Unfortunately, battling stress is rarely a one-time thing. The struggle will continue until the root of the issue is adequately addressed and managed. Left unchecked, it slowly creeps into every part of an individual's life, from jobs to relationships, and even self-worth and confidence.

While each age group stresses over different things, the data shows that we need to learn how to handle our

anxiety before it has disastrous or even deadly results.

But there is hope. If you are stressed out, here are five time-tested and practical things you can start doing today to turn the tide in your battle with stress. All five are backed by a reliable authority: God's Word.

Understanding the Problem

In addition to the 55 percent of U.S. adults who said they cannot enjoy life due to stress or its symptoms, 48 percent of those surveyed reported that they cry at least once a week. Sadly, 30



they overeat to deal with stress, and 39 percent turn to alcohol to find relief.

More than three-quarters of the survey respondents felt that if more people prioritized mental health, the world would be a better place, and 52 percent would gladly pay higher taxes to see improved mental health services supported by the government.

The current decade has been formidable for all generations: 45 percent of U.S. adults cite it as the most stressful decade in sixty years. Millennials and Gen Z are getting hit hardest. Right now, stress is the highest it has ever been for 65 percent of millennials and 64 percent of Gen Z. The majority of Gen Z (61 percent) rate their stress level as “unreasonable” and feel that they experience more stress than the average person. Both millennials (55 percent) and Gen Z (55 percent) report difficulty functioning due to stress. Only 30 percent of baby boomers feel this way.

Examining Stressors

Housing prices are a significant concern for millennials, with 64 percent citing it as a primary stressor. On the flip side, 34 percent of American homeowners believe they would not be as stressed if they did not own a home.

While 2 in 3 Americans say that social media is a significant stressor and is bad for society, at least they can remedy this by logging off or putting down the phone. Other catalysts for stress are more challenging to manage.

Low salaries (57 percent) and poor work-life balance (46 percent) are two significant stressors that are more difficult to fix. Employees are often overworked with assigned tasks and longer than regular shifts, with poor benefits and inadequate paid time off. The stress from these factors leads to burnout and low employee morale, which impacts the economy by creating increased unemployment due to the high turnover rate.

Combining low pay with an increasing cost of living translates to most Americans feeling like they can-

not get their heads above water. Prices are rising, but salaries are not keeping pace.

These are just some of the underlying factors for Americans’ stress. Living conditions in the United States are not likely to improve dramatically in the short term. Therefore, if you feel like you are in crisis due to stress, take action.

(1) Meditate

When you feel stressed, simply slowing down and taking time to meditate can work wonders. Meditation is simple and anyone can do it. According to *Merriam-Webster*, the word meditate simply means “to engage in contemplation or reflection.”

The concept of mindfulness meditation has gained popularity only recently. You could be surprised to know that the practice originated in Scripture, endorsed by some of God’s greatest servants. Genesis 24:63 records that “Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide”—apparently this was a habit for him.

King David led a stressful life. He led Israel, fought wars, dealt with family betrayal and tragedy, and much more. This drove him to deep contemplation. David shows us what meditation looks like in the Psalms.

He wrote: “O LORD, our LORD, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!...When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; What is man, that You are mindful of him? And the son of man, that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and have crowned him with glory and honor. You made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet” (8:1-6).

David took time to “consider” God’s handiwork and get his mind off of his problems. Focusing on something greater than himself helped him get through his life challenges.

Start small. Even devoting a precious few minutes of your free time can

percent of the respondents say they are not doing anything to help or improve their mental health or reduce tension.

Stress is also widely recognized as harming relationships, with 59 percent of Americans citing it as a major cause of difficulty in marriage, romantic relationships, other familial associations and friendships. The tension has the potential to be particularly damaging to families. Parents may take out their frustrations on their children, spouse or both as stress increases.

Coping methods add to the problem. More than 40 percent of adults say

have a benefit. Put down your smartphone, get away from distractions and just be present with your thoughts. Over time, you can try to work up to longer sessions. It can also be helpful to keep a journal and write down some takeaways from what you are thinking about.

Modern research supports this. According to the American Psychological Association, “People have been meditating for thousands of years, often as part of a spiritual practice. But in more recent years, mindfulness has become a popular way to help people manage their stress and improve their overall well-being—and a wealth of research shows it’s effective.”

“Researchers reviewed more than 200 studies of mindfulness among healthy people and found mindfulness-based therapy was especially effective for reducing stress, anxiety and depression.”

(2) Exercise

Exercise is not just for losing weight or getting six-pack abs. Studies show it impacts the mind as well. The John W. Brick Mental Health Foundation compiled an extensive report encompassing over 30 years of published research on how exercise affects mental health. They wrote, “Three decades of science make it clear: exercise should be integrated into prevention and treatment of mental illness and promotion of mental wellness...89% of all published peer-reviewed research between 1990 and 2022 found a positive, statistically significant relationship between exercise/physical activity and mental health.”

Exercise’s benefits are also found in the pages of Scripture: “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (I Tim. 4:8, New International Version). Although it pales in comparison to godliness—good character—exercise does provide “some value.” Do not underestimate what it can do for you.

During stressful times, getting up and moving is a great idea. This

could involve something simple like a walk around the block or lifting some free weights for a few minutes. Or you could try something a little more involved like a group exercise class, a longer hike in the woods or learning a new sport.

To learn much more about the benefits of exercise, read our free booklet *God’s Principles of Healthful Living* at rcg.org/glohl.

(3) Talk to Friends and Family

Resist the temptation to isolate yourself when you are stressed. Your support group, made up of family and friends, is a valuable resource. Just spending time with other people and not letting your troubles keep you down is beneficial.

Proverbs 27:17 illustrates this: “As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend” (New Living Translation).

Americans Feel the Weight of Stress

A survey of 1,000 people, conducted by Clever Real Estate, polled respondents about what caused them stress.

80%
Cost of Living

73%
Inflation

57%
Mental Health

55%
Debt

53%
Physical Health

49%
Home

48%
Relationships

45%
Job

Being around people we respect encourages us to improve. Seeing the example of someone who is successfully managing their stress, or sharing concerns with a person who is dealing with similar issues can help you sharpen your approach to life.

You can also open up to them about some of the things that are stressing you out and ask for advice. Friends and family may be able to bring a perspective on what you are dealing with that you are not seeing. Proverbs 19:20 adds, “Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter end.”

An article in *Time* magazine discussed takeaways on friendship from the ongoing Harvard Study of Adult Development. It stated, “Since 1938, researchers have been following 724 men, tracking their physical health as well as social habits. Robert Waldinger, the study’s current director, said in his recent TED Talk, ‘The clearest message that we get from this 75-year study is this: Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period.’ Socially disconnected people are, according to Waldinger, ‘less happy, their health declines earlier in midlife, their brain functioning declines sooner, and they live shorter lives than people who are not lonely.’”

Chances are, most people reading this article will be able to think of at least a few people you could reach out to. You may already be keeping in touch with certain people on a regular basis, but if you are not, take a moment to send that text or that direct message on Instagram that could rekindle your connection.

What if you do not have any friends? Try making some. Go to events in your local community, such as volunteering opportunities, chess clubs or book clubs at a library. Engage your neighbors in small talk. Offer to help them with something in their yard to break the ice. There are plenty of ways to increase your level of social interaction.

Depending on your level of stress and its physical manifestations, you

may also want to consult a medical professional for additional guidance.

(4) Examine Your Coping Methods

Unfortunately, many people cope with stress in unhealthy, even destructive ways. Experts recommend avoiding substances like alcohol, drugs and smoking to relieve stress.

Be honest with yourself. Evaluate whether your responses are good or bad for you. If you turn to negative substances or behaviors, you are worsening the problem.

God’s Word shows that self-examination is a vital habit to build (I Cor. 11:28; II Cor. 13:5). It also provides a simple solution to wrong coping methods: “Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it” (Psa. 34:14). If your coping methods are “evil”—bad for you—stop them. Find something productive to do with your time instead.

If you catch yourself binge-watching several unfulfilling hours of Netflix or emptying a six-pack of Bud Light when you feel down, replace them with other hobbies that are better for you. Listen to some classical music. Read a book that makes you think. Try your hand at a new hobby like painting or bike riding. Do things that stimulate your mind and leave you feeling fulfilled.

You can also seize the opportunity to review your life goals. If you are stressed about the economy or your job, try to channel that energy toward taking tangible steps to improve your financial situation. Pursue training on a new skill, update your resume for a new job or revisit your budget to cut back on spending. Our free booklet *Taking Charge of Your Finances* at rcg.org/tcoyf is a helpful resource for managing personal finances.

(5) Time in Nature

Wise King Solomon wrote, “Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun” (Ecc. 11:7, New King James Version). Obviously, he was not advocating for us to stare directly at the sun. This is scriptural backing for getting outside.

Modern science also supports this habit. An article in *Yale Environment 360* stated, “In a study of 20,000 people, a team led by Mathew White of the European Centre for Environment & Human Health at the University of Exeter, found that people who spent two hours a week in green spaces—local parks or other natural environments, either all at once or spaced over several visits—were substantially more likely to report good health and psychological well-being than those who don’t.”

A Mayo Clinic article stated, “... nature may be able to combat stress and its effects. For example, one study showed that exposure to nature can regulate the sympathetic nervous system in as little as five minutes.

“This means that we can get an almost immediate benefit from stepping outside,” says [Mayo Clinic nurse practitioner Jodie M. Smith]. And doing so on a recurrent basis may prevent cumulative effects from stress, which could mean a lower risk for chronic disease, illness and mortality.”

If you feel stressed, head outdoors and put this tip to the test.

Win Your Stress Battle

We have examined five time-tested natural remedies for defeating stress, proven by science and the Bible. Take action and apply them. God is willing to help you win your battle with stress. The verses we looked at, and Christianity in general, produce a life of peace and abundance.

In Matthew 11, Jesus Christ said, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (11:29-30). In John 10:10, He added, “...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Although many Americans are reeling from the high stress epidemic, this does not have to be you. You can face and defeat your stressors and live the abundant life God promises. □

What Did *Jesus* Say About Evolution?

Did man evolve? Or is he a created being? This debate has raged for years, and has left many Bible readers confused. Yet God's Word is clear on the subject.

MEET ARDI. She was featured on the July 2010 *National Geographic* cover. According to scientists, this 4-million-year-old female, *Ardipithecus Ramidus* (Ardi for short), is the oldest hominid skeleton—a look back in time along mankind's "evolutionary road." The previous year, the magazine published an article on Ardi that boasted, "Move over, Lucy. And kiss the missing link goodbye."

At the time, *Science* magazine proclaimed the find the "Breakthrough of the Year." Other publications produced detailed drawings of Ardi, how she looked and might have lived.

But there is disagreement in the scientific community. Was Ardi an

early human or just an extinct ape? Primatologist Esteban Sarmiento questioned Ardi as a human ancestor in a comment in *Science*: "Molecular and anatomical studies rather suggest that [Ardi] predates the human/African ape divergence"—which supposedly occurred 3 to 5 million years ago.

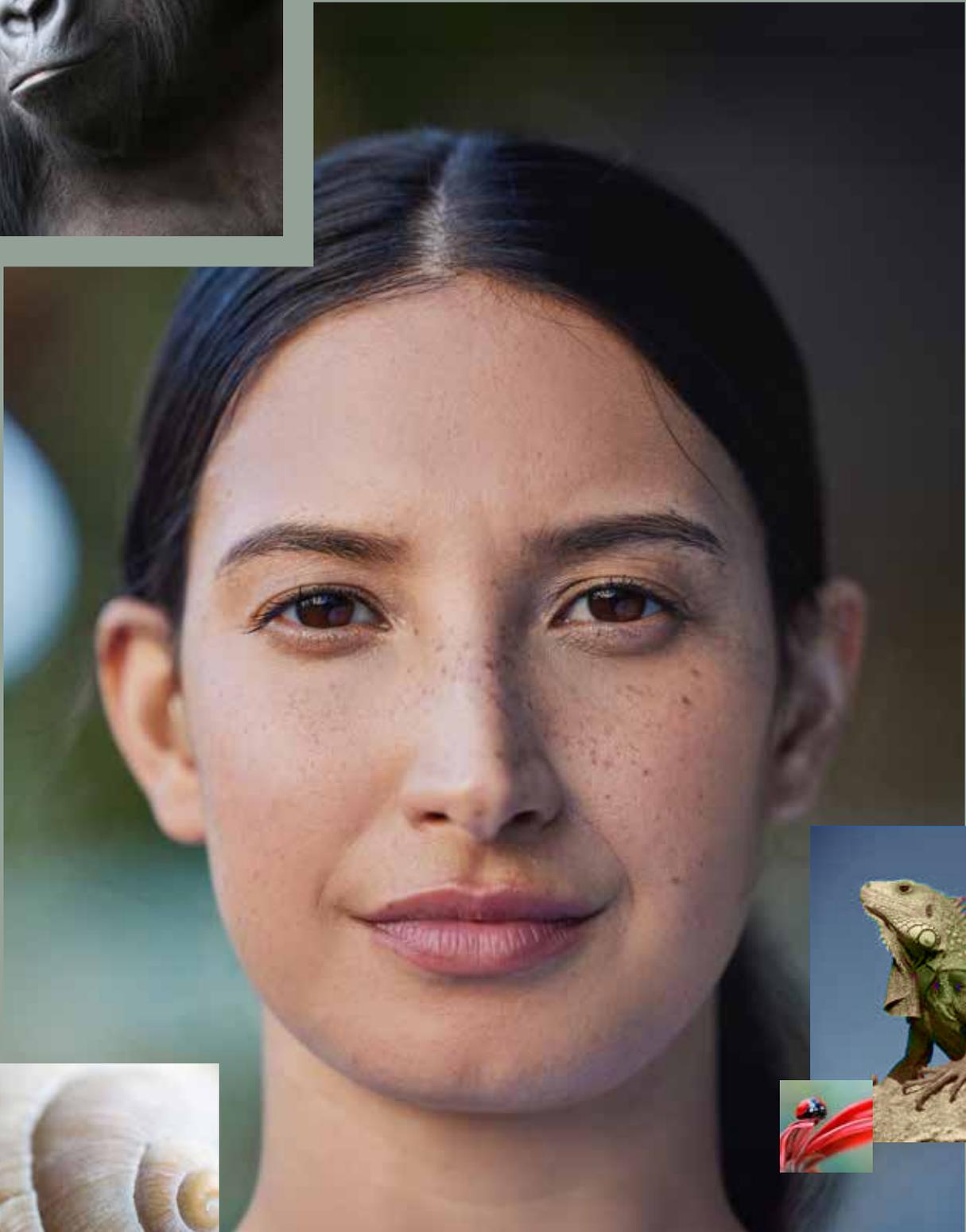
Creationists bring even more criticism, reasoning there is not a complete skeleton of the hominid, and what has been found does not give enough detail to create artistic illustrations and extrapolations by scientists about how the creature lived. Thus, they claim, the scientific community is grasping at evolutionary straws to fit their hypothesis that Ardi is the missing link.

Caught in the midst of this battle are Christians. They pick up their Bibles and understand the account in Genesis: six days of Creation, and on the seventh, God rested. Yet leading scientific minds say mankind evolved—with this idea almost universally accepted, with numerous scientific articles having been written to support it.

So which is it? Does the Bible support a literal seven-day Creation or an evolutionary record?

Happy Medium?

In an effort to satisfy both sides of the debate, some try to merge the theory of evolution with the existence of a Creator God—devising a kind of



“happy medium” position. This is often termed theistic evolution.

The book *The Creation-Evolution Controversy* defines this thinking: “... theistic evolution contends that abiogenesis (the spontaneous formation of life from chemicals) and evolution (amoeba to man through eons) have occurred, but a creator was instrumental in forming the initial matter and laws, and more or less guided the whole process.”

Theistic evolutionists believe God created the physical universe and all life found within it, but that biological evolution is a natural process within that creation. Simply put, they believe the God of the Bible did not create man *directly*, but rather created the matter and then *guided* the process of traditional evolution.

According to this view, the fossil record is proof of evolution—yet, since life is too complicated to have happened by itself, God must be behind it all. In a sense, it teaches that evolution is simply a tool God used to *develop* single-cell organisms into complex human life.

On the surface, this sounds plausible. One might even reason, *God is infinitely powerful. Why couldn't He use evolution if He wished or wanted?*

The best way to address this question is by examining the text of the Bible to see what God Himself has to say on the matter.

In the Beginning

The book of Genesis states, “In the beginning God created the heaven[s] and the earth” (1:1).

In another place the Bible declares, “By the Word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth... Let all the earth fear the LORD... For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it [the earth] stood fast” (Psa. 33:6, 8-9).

Genesis states God created all life on Earth—plant, animal and human. He created sea creatures after their kind, birds after their kind and land animals after their kind (Gen. 1:20-25).

The Bible also records, “God *created* man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female *created* He them” (Gen. 1:27) and, “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (2:7).

Taken at face value, this account shows man did not evolve from lower life forms—he is a created being, made in the image and likeness of his Creator. He did not come from some primate that gradually “evolved” into man over eons of time. Rather, Genesis 1:31 states God created him at a *specific point in time*—within the finite period of the sixth day.

Here lies the problem with any form of theistic evolution. If the Creation account of Genesis—including Adam and Eve’s creation—was not a *literal* event that actually occurred—then it must be merely a metaphor, allegory or nice story. If this is true, then how many other biblical accounts are similarly fictional—including accounts of Jesus’ own life?

Proof Within

For some, the only way to settle this matter conclusively would be for Jesus Christ to appear and set the record straight. While this is not possible now, realize the Bible is filled with about three-quarters of a million of God’s words, which each demonstrate His thinking on a host of subjects.

While the word *evolution* is not found anywhere in the Bible, a careful reader can understand the mind of God on the matter. In fact, during His ministry on Earth, Christ *did* comment on the authenticity of the Genesis Creation account.

Some 4,000 years after the recorded events of Genesis, Jesus prayed to the Father, “Your Word is truth” (John 17:17). This is a reference to the books of the Old Testament, including Genesis. He called that record true—the truth!

Notice: “In the beginning was the Word [Jesus Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made (John 1:1-3).

Read the last part again: “All things”—including Adam and Eve—“were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.”

God’s Word is either true or it is not!

Jesus confirmed the Genesis account in a confrontation with the Pharisees, the established religious leaders of the time, and certain other leading Jews. The Pharisees claimed they descended from Abraham—and Jesus did not disagree, saying, “I know that you are Abraham’s seed” (John 8:37). Christ acknowledged that this patriarch *did* exist, and by extension that his life story, recorded in Genesis, was not just a metaphor.

But Jesus went further. Although He recognized the Pharisees descended from Abraham, Christ stated that they did not do the “works of Abraham” (John 8:39), but were of their “father the devil.” The account states, “You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer *from the beginning...*” (vs. 44). Lost to most Bible readers is that Christ is actually validating the Creation account in His reference to Satan.

The devil being a murderer *from the beginning* describes an event that happened in the Garden of Eden very shortly after Adam and Eve’s creation. Satan, in the guise of a serpent, deceived Eve into eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:1-6). Adam followed Eve and ate also. God had told Adam and Eve that if they ate from it, they would die (2:17)—and they did (5:5).

With this cunning act, Satan in a sense murdered the first human beings—making him a murderer from the *beginning*. Jesus was not confused or in doubt as to whether this event happened. He used it in declaring the source of the motives of those who sought to kill Him (John 8:40, 59).

In Matthew, Jesus Christ’s genealogy is traced to Abraham: “The book

of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of *Abraham*... So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto *Christ* are fourteen generations” (1:1, 17).

Luke records Jesus’ genealogy *back to Adam*: “Jesus Himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli...the *son of Adam*, which was the *son of God*” (3:23, 38).

Think. Why would one of God’s first-century servants have recorded this genealogy if Adam was never created, but had evolved? Also note that Adam was referred to as the “son of God,” meaning he was “formed.” Remember, God’s Word is true (John 17:17).

What about other people recorded in Genesis? Did Jesus reference—validate—them?

First, notice Abel—Adam and Eve’s second son: “That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous *Abel* unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias” (Matt. 23:35).

Jesus also mentioned Noah: “And as it was in the days of *Noah*, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that *Noah* entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:26-27). Also see Matthew 24:37-39.

Additionally, note this reference to Lot: “Likewise also as it was in the days of *Lot*; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but the same day that *Lot* went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:28-29).

New Testament Validates Genesis

The apostles Peter, Paul, John and Jude all reference events from the book of Genesis. Did they stretch the truth to prove a point, using fictional stories or allegories? Or did they hearken back to

real people and events recorded in the inspired Word of God?

Peter referenced Noah, Lot, Sodom and Gomorrah—all people and places recorded in Genesis! Notice: “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of *Noah*, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (I Pet. 3:20).

“In Hebrews 11, Paul references Adam’s son Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (vs. 4–22). Would he have mentioned these Bible figures if he did not believe the record of Genesis?”

He mentioned them again in II Peter 2:5-7: “And spared not the *old world* [the ancient world in which Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Enoch and others lived], but saved *Noah* the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of *Sodom and Gomorrah* into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just *Lot*, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.”

Paul directly mentions Adam throughout his epistles: “For *Adam* was first formed, then Eve” (I Tim. 2:13). “Nevertheless death reigned from *Adam* to *Moses*” (Rom. 5:14). “For as in *Adam* all die, even so in *Christ* shall all be made alive” (I Cor.

15:22). These verses plainly endorse the Creation account!

In Hebrews 11, Paul references Adam’s son Abel (vs. 4), Enoch (vs. 5), Noah (vs. 7), Abraham (vs. 8, 17), Sarah (vs. 11), Isaac (vs. 20), Jacob (vs. 20) and Joseph (vs. 22). Would he have mentioned these Bible figures if he did not believe the record of Genesis?

John wrote of Cain and Abel: “Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother [Abel]. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous” (I John 3:12).

Jude, Jesus Christ’s brother, also confirmed the existence of Cain, Enoch (Noah’s great grandfather) and Adam: “Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of *Cain*” (Jude 11), and “*Enoch* also, the seventh from *Adam*, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints” (vs. 14). Here yet again is a *New Testament* servant referring to—and thereby *validating*—events of the Old Testament!

Two Options

When presented with proof of the validity of Genesis and of the Creation—not by evolutionary processes, but by a God who brought mankind into existence as wholly complete human beings—you must either accept the Bible for what it says or reject it completely.

King Solomon recorded in Proverbs that “*every word* of God is pure” (30:5). Christ further taught that man should live by “*every word* that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). “Every word”—Old Testament or New—means *every* word, including those of the book of Genesis.

This is an all or nothing proposition—there is no middle ground to stand on. Either you believe every word, or you might as well throw out the entire Bible!

The position that God did not create Adam—that he did not exist—makes Paul, John, Peter, Jude, even Jesus Christ, into liars.

You are left with a choice. Will you believe the biblical record? □



6,000 Years Ago—or 460 Million?

Geologists record that trilobites appeared during the Cambrian era—more than 500 million years ago—and existed for hundreds of millions of years more before they went extinct.

What does the Bible say about such pre-historic creatures? Does their existence disprove—or does it actually prove—the validity of Scripture? Read the article “Is the Earth 6,000 Years Old?” for the answer!

rcg.org/realtruth

PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

The apostle Peter also preached the kingdom of God: “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the *everlasting kingdom* of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 1:11). So did the apostle James: “Hearken, my beloved brethren, has not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the *kingdom* which He has promised to them that love Him?” (2:5).

Matthew’s account mentions “gospel of the kingdom” three times. Notice: “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the *gospel of the kingdom*, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (9:35). In most of His parables,

Christ taught the basics of the kingdom of God. Matthew alone makes over fifty references to it.

Luke records that Jesus Christ commissioned His disciples to preach this same message: “Then He called His twelve disciples together...And He sent them to preach the *kingdom of God*” (9:1-2). Soon after, He sent seventy others to preach, and they also carried the message of the “kingdom of God” (10:1, 9).

Standing before Pontius Pilate on the night He was betrayed, Christ gave an important clue to understanding the kingdom: “My *kingdom* is not of this world [this *present society*]” (John 18:36).

It is important to understand that the kingdom of God is preceded by a seven-year runoff. The Bible describes this period as “the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6). EVERYTHING will change

and all mankind will be given opportunity to seek God—qualifying to *enter* the kingdom of God when it arrives. Coming to understand the true gospel is the only path to achieving the staggering potential every human being possesses—including you! As the apostle Paul explained to the Corinthians, “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him” (I Cor. 2:9). Do *everything you can* to understand the “good news” Christ brought and to *enter* the kingdom of God it explains!

Studying this Personal is an all-important first step. Look forward to the updated version of *Which Is the True Gospel?* In the meantime, you may wish to study our related book *The Awesome Potential of Man* at rcg.org/tapom. □

More Than 60 Percent of U.S. Abortions in 2023 Were Done by Pill

Reuters – The proportion of U.S. abortions administered by medication rose to more than 60 percent in 2023, following a dramatic decline in surgical abortion access after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, a new report said.

The Supreme Court's 2022 decision to end abortion rights allowed more than a dozen states to ban abortion with limited exceptions and close clinics, restricting access to surgical abortion procedures.

That in turn led to a growing reliance on a two-pill regimen to terminate pregnancies, with U.S. abortions administered by pill increasing 10 percent since 2020, according to the Guttmacher Institute, an abortion rights advocacy group.

The Institute's report is published every three years and is based on data collected from U.S. abortion providers.

The survey found over 1 million total abortions were provided through the U.S. healthcare system in 2023, the first time that number exceeded a million since 2012.

"As abortion restrictions proliferate post-Dobbs, medication abortion may be the most viable option—or the only option—for some people, even if they would have preferred in-person procedural care," said Guttmacher principal research scientist Rachel Jones, referring to the Supreme Court case that overruled *Roe v. Wade's* 1973 precedent.

However, access to medication abortion also hangs in the balance.

The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on March 26 dealing with a bid by President Joe Biden's administration to preserve broad access to mifepristone, one part of the two-pill regimen that the Food and Drug

Administration (FDA) approved in 2000 for terminating early pregnancies. The ruling is expected by early summer.

The method involves two drugs, taken over a day or two. The first, mifepristone, blocks the pregnancy-sustaining hormone progesterone. The second, misoprostol, induces uterine contractions.

The New Orleans-based 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decided in August to reimpose restrictions on mifepristone's delivery and distribution that the FDA had loosened to ease

access during the COVID-19 pandemic. That decision is on hold pending Supreme Court action.

The FDA maintains the drug is safe and effective, pointing to its decades of use by millions of American women with exceedingly rare adverse effects.

The Guttmacher survey found the 2023 increase in total abortions was concentrated in states where terminating a pregnancy remains legal and which are adjacent to states that have banned abortion.

The survey likely undercounted the number of abortions in the U.S. since it did not account for terminations obtained outside the formal U.S. healthcare system, such as those done with pills mailed from abroad. □



A patient prepares to take the first of two combination pills, mifepristone, for a medication abortion during a visit to a clinic in Kansas City, Kansas (Oct. 12, 2022).

AP/CHARLIE RIEDEL

Chemicals in Plastics Far More Numerous Than Previous Estimates



Plastic garbage scattered at the Keramat beach in Bandar Lampung, Indonesia (July 18, 2023).
PERDIANSYAH/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

London (Reuters) – At least 3,000 more chemicals are in plastics—from food packaging to toys to medical devices—than previously estimated by environmental agencies, a report found, raising questions over pollution and consumer safety.

While the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) had previously identified around 13,000 plastic chemicals, the report by a team of European scientists found more than 16,000 chemicals in plastics—a quarter of which are thought to be hazardous to human health and the environment.

The report, funded by the Norwegian Research Council, comes as

government negotiators grapple with devising the world’s first treaty to tackle mounting plastic pollution, as some 400 million tons of plastic waste are produced every year.

“To robustly solve plastic pollution, you actually have to look at the full life cycle of plastics and you have to address the chemicals issue,” said report co-author Jane Muncke, managing director of the Swiss nonprofit Food Packaging Forum.

That is because plastic chemicals can leach into water and food.

“We’re finding hundreds, if not thousands, of plastic chemicals in people now and some of them have been

linked to adverse health outcomes,” Dr. Muncke said.

Such impacts include fertility issues and cardiovascular disease.

“When we look into...products that we’re using on a daily basis, we usually find between hundreds, if not thousands of chemicals in an individual plastic product,” said lead author Martin Wagner, an environmental toxicologist at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

Kimberly Wise White, vice president of regulatory and technical affairs for the American Chemistry Council, an industry group whose membership is dominated by plastics makers, said the findings sought to “advance a hazard framework that ignores real-world exposures and paints an incomplete picture for regulators and the public.”

While the plastics industry has said any global treaty should promote recycling and re-use of plastic, only addressing plastic waste does not go far enough to protect people, the report’s authors said.

Scientists flagged the need for greater transparency on what chemicals—including additives, processing aids and impurities—are going into plastics, including recycled products.

A quarter of the identified chemicals lack basic information on their basic chemical identity, the report said.

“At the core of the problem is the chemical complexity of plastics,” said Mr. Wagner, who also serves on the board of the Scientists’ Coalition for an Effective Plastics Treaty.

“Often producers don’t really know which kind of chemicals they have in their products and that comes from very complex value chains.”

Only 6 percent of the chemicals found in plastics are regulated internationally. Without regulatory pressure, “there is no motivation to disclose what’s in the plastics,” he said. That is something a plastics treaty could help to address. □

783 Million People Face Chronic Hunger. Yet the World Wastes 19 Percent of Its Food

Nairobi, Kenya (AP) – The world wasted an estimated 19 percent of the food produced globally in 2022, or about 1.05 billion metric tons, according to a new United Nations report.

The UN Environment Programme's Food Waste Index Report tracks the progress of countries to halve food waste by 2030.

The UN said the number of countries reporting for the index nearly doubled from the first report in 2021. The 2021 report estimated that 17 percent of the food produced globally in 2019, or 1.03 billion tons, was wasted, but authors warned against direct comparisons because of the lack of sufficient data from many countries.

The report is co-authored by UNEP and Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), an international charity.

Researchers analyzed country data on households, food service and retailers. They found that each person wastes about 174 pounds of food annually, equal to at least 1 billion meals wasted worldwide daily.

Most of the waste—60 percent—came in households. About 28 percent came from food service, or restaurants, with about 12 percent from retailers.

“It is a travesty,” said co-author Clementine O'Connor, the focal point for food waste at UNEP. “It doesn't make any sense, and it is a complicated problem, but through collaboration and systemic action, it is one that can be tackled.”

The report comes at a time when 783 million people around the world face chronic hunger and many places face deepening food crises. The Israel-

Hamas war and violence in Haiti have worsened the crisis, with experts saying that famine is imminent in northern Gaza and approaching in Haiti.

Food waste is also a global concern because of the environmental toll of production, including the land and water required to raise crops and animals.

Fadila Jumare, a Nigeria-based project associate at Busara Center for Behavioral Economics who has studied prevention of food waste in Kenya and Nigeria, said the problem further disadvantages many people who are already food insecure and cannot afford healthy diets.

“For humanity, food waste means that less food is available to the poorest

A bin of food waste spills across the pavement in London, England (May 30, 2023).

RICHARD BAKER/IN PICTURES VIA GETTY IMAGE



population,” said Ms. Jumare, who was not involved in the report.

Brian Roe, a food waste researcher at Ohio State University who was not involved with the report, said the index is important to tackling food waste.

“The key takeaway is that reducing the amount of food that is wasted is an avenue that can lead to many desirable outcomes—resource conservation, fewer environmental damages, greater food security, and more land for uses other than as landfills and food production,” said Mr. Roe.

The report showed notable growth in coverage of food waste in low- and middle-income countries, the authors said. But it may fall to wealthier nations to lead in international cooperation and policy development to reduce food waste, they stated.

The report said many governments, regional and industry groups are using public-private partnerships to reduce food waste and its contributions to climate and water stress. Governments and municipalities collaborate with businesses in the food supply chain, whereby businesses commit to measure food waste.

The report said food redistribution—including donating surplus food to food banks and charities—is significant in tackling food waste among retailers.

The report's authors said they found that the differences in per capita household food waste between high-income and lower-income countries were surprisingly small.

Richard Swannel, a co-author and director of Impact Growth at WRAP, said that shows food waste “is not a rich world problem. It's a global problem.”

“The data is really clear on this point: that here is a problem right around the world and one that we could all tackle tomorrow to save ourselves money and reduce environmental impact,” he said. □



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