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DISCERN

A Magazine of *Life Hope & Truth*



**THE DIVINE
DESIGN OF FAMILY**

Table of Contents

News

24 WorldWatch

26 World InSight
Europe's Uncertain Future

Columns

3 Consider This

Living in His Image

29 Christ vs. Christianity
What It *Really* Means to Be Saved:
Saved From What?

31 By the Way

Eternity Calling

Feature

4 The Divine Design of Family
Marriage and family didn't just evolve, but today's families definitely aren't living up to what God designed. Understanding His plan can help us build better families now and prepare to take our place in His perfect, eternal family.

Departments

7 Adulting Milestones: The Success Sequence

The transition from our teen years to adulthood can be daunting, with a flurry of life-altering decisions and responsibilities. But here is a sequence that can lead to success.

10 A Foothold for the Devil

What's wrong with being angry? There's plenty in our lives and in the news to get upset about, but God's Word is filled with warnings against letting our anger spiral out of control.



4



10



20



23

14 Four Keys to Raising Resilient Kids

While you may not be able to completely shield your kids from pain and hardship, there are steps you can take to help them face difficulties with a can-do mind-set.

17 The Curious Conundrum of Curiosity

It's curious how curiosity can bring out the best and worst in us. How can we cultivate the benefits and avoid the pitfalls?

20 Heart, Soul and Mind—3 Components in Loving God

Does it make any difference how we worship God? Is how we feel about our relationship with Him all that matters?

23 Wonders of God's Creation: A Bug's Life

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LIVING IN HIS IMAGE

W

**Which is more amazing,
God's creation of life or His
creation of how to live?**



marriage, child development and family bonds in general. But once a year—typically in the July/August issue—we have multiple articles featuring the family.

Why spotlight this subject so regularly? Because the sanctity of life and the family is being undermined, if not directly attacked. Most often it's undermined by ignorance,

but too often now it's also attacked by the intentional rejection of our Creator. Either way, we're striving to fill the gaps in knowledge and counter the assaults on family values.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge," Solomon wrote, "but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7). One great example of this principle is understanding how God's Seventh Commandment—don't commit adultery—is designed to protect the entire family structure. When husbands and wives cherish, love and are faithful to one another, you see ever-increasing loyalty, commitment and stability that extends to their children and grandchildren and into society itself.

God's creation of life itself simply leaves one in awe. Who are you? There was a time when a tiny human egg, smaller than the period at the end of this sentence, united with a far tinier sperm cell, and together they contained all the genetic information that produced you, a human being unlike any other that has ever existed.

It's hard for us today to improve on the way King David expressed it 3,000 years ago, when he pondered the wonders of human reproduction and extolled the God who designed it. "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb," he wrote in Psalm 139:13-14. "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Even atheists marvel at the complexity and design of all forms of life. But believers see much more—creation is a witness to the need for a Creator. In other words, it is one of many proofs of God's existence. And human life, because we are made in His image, is the pinnacle of His creation!

The instruction manual

Since so many people are amazed at how God created human life, it's odd, and sad, that so many, even believers, pay little attention to something equally important: the way He created for us to live.

What about *living* in the image of how God lives? If God designed the physical laws that regulate the complexities of a body's functioning, isn't it logical that He also designed the spiritual, mental and emotional laws that govern the complexities of human relationships?

Actually, the Bible is God's instruction manual, guiding us to understand what governs, and how to productively manage, our relationships with God and with one another.

Undermined and attacked

Since the family structure is the foundation for all human relationships, we often write about strengthening

The next dimension of reproduction

Even more beautiful and astounding, the more you learn from the Bible about family, the more you see that God has not finished His creation. Marriage and family actually foreshadow the next great miraculous stage in God's plan. If you wonder at the miracle of physical procreation, wait till you grasp the miracle of spiritual!

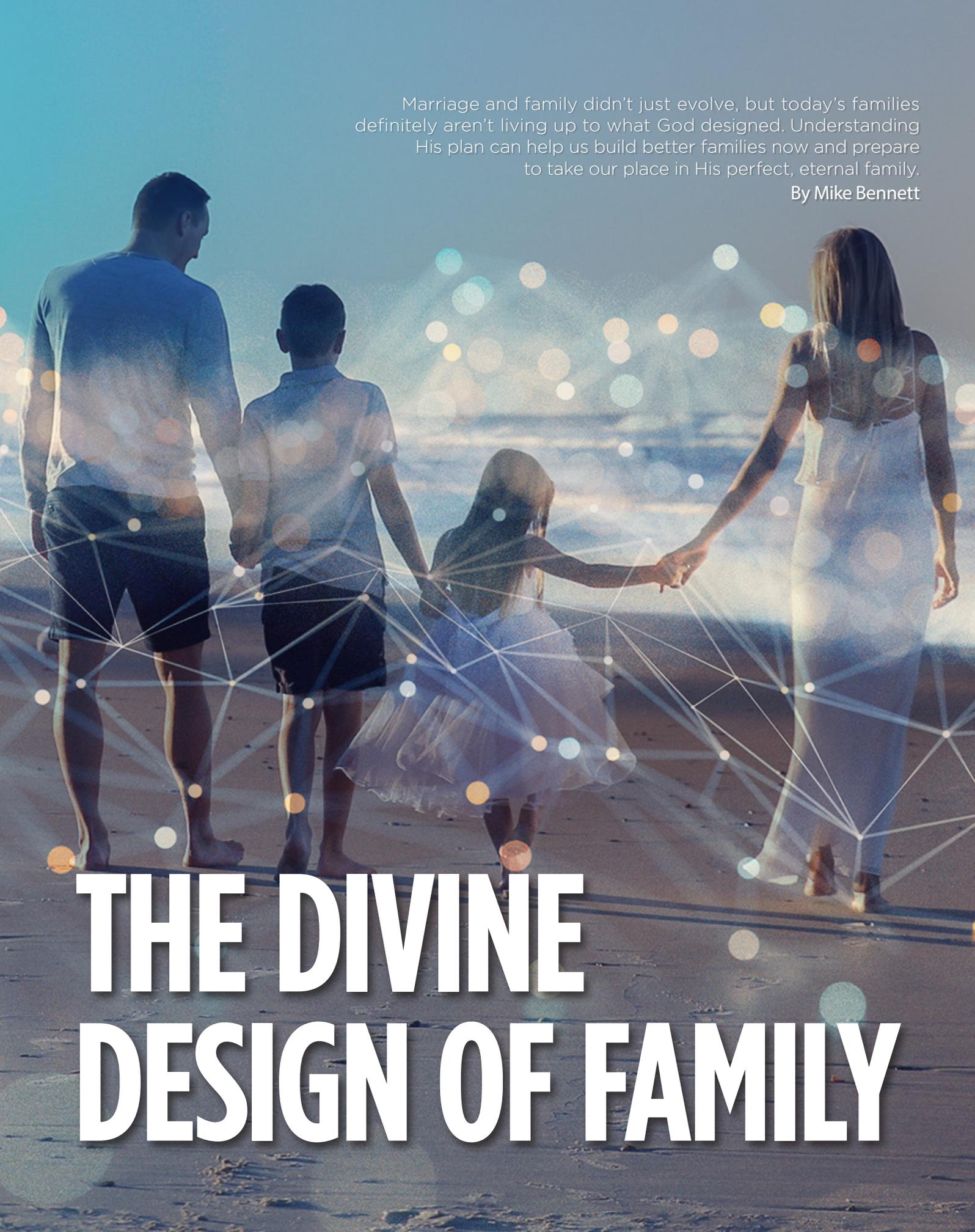
The apostle John marveled, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! ... Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-2).

So whether it's physical family or spiritual family, we're glad you are with us on the quest to always be learning more about God's amazing creation and the way He wants His creation to live!

Clyde Kilough
Editor

Marriage and family didn't just evolve, but today's families definitely aren't living up to what God designed. Understanding His plan can help us build better families now and prepare to take our place in His perfect, eternal family.

By Mike Bennett



THE DIVINE DESIGN OF FAMILY

The Bible claims marriage is symbolic of a great and wonderful mystery (Ephesians 5:32). It also describes the result of God's amazing love in family terms:

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1).

But these superlatives stand in stark contrast with the realities of modern families. Given the miseries so many experience, marriage and family can seem to be outmoded institutions that we must evolve beyond.

Accident or design?

How did marriage and family become the nearly universal building blocks of societies around the world throughout history? Some who believe family is a result of evolution believe monogamy was just a mistake.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead said, “Fathers are biological necessities, but social accidents.” She believed other social structures could easily have evolved that didn't include a continuing role for fathers.

Evolutionary biologist David P. Barash wrote, “Monogamy is under siege from our biology itself. Men are typically larger than women, have more muscle mass, are more inclined to violence and become sexually and socially mature later. These traits are characteristic of an animal species in which one male competes with other males to mate with multiple females” (“Is Monogamy Over?” *Time*, Sept. 21, 2015, p. 64). Yet he also said:

“Even though monogamy isn't natural and therefore isn't easy, it does offer the benefit of biparental care. It's rare for any species to engage in biparental care unless the males are guaranteed that they are genetically related to the offspring—confidence monogamy alone can provide. And because human children need so much parental assistance, protection and investment, humans, perhaps more than any other animal, especially benefit from monogamy.”

Other scientists have cataloged additional advantages of marriage and family. The June 13, 2016, *Time* cover feature summarized some of the benefits of marriage even in our rapidly changing modern world:

“At the same time, new evidence keeps piling up that few things are as good for life, limb and liquidity as staying married. ‘Couples who have made it all the way later into life have found it to be a peak

experience, a sublime experience to be together,’ says Karl Pillemer, a Cornell University gerontologist who did an intensive survey of 700 elderly people for his book *30 Lessons for Loving*. ‘Everybody—100%—said at one point that the long marriage was the best thing in their lives.

“‘But all of them also either said that marriage is hard,’ he adds, ‘or that it's really, really hard’” (p. 38).

(The benefits to children of a strong two-parent family have been documented in many studies. See the sidebar “Family Facts” for some of these.)

But are marriage and family just a chance fluke of evolution, institutions that we are evolving out of? Or is there a reason for the benefits—and the challenges—of these most intimate relationships?

From the beginning

God claims the credit for the creation of marriage and the family.

When Jesus was asked about divorce, He put the subject in context:

“Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4-6).

God designed the intimate relationship of marriage to be exclusive and lasting—and to be a type of the deep bond between Jesus Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:32). He intended marriages to produce godly offspring, with the family reflecting the eternal relationship He wants with us (Malachi 2:15; 2 Corinthians 6:18).

Family failings

In spite of these divine purposes, human failings soon blemished the beautiful relationships God intended. Adam and Eve succumbed to temptations that led to much harder living conditions and a battle between the sexes. Their first son gave in to jealousy and killed his own brother. And family life has generally gone downhill from there.

Was there a design flaw in the relationships God created? No. But we have deviated from the divine design. Human choices of shoddy materials (such as replacing love and commitment with lust

and selfishness) and construction shortcuts (such as premarital sex, lack of preparation and lack of dedication) prevent the building of the perfect relationships God laid out in the Bible.

The design has been resilient enough to provide benefits to millions over the millennia. But our variations on the family have all had deep flaws and produced far too many tragic evils, from dysfunctional families to abuse. We must not confuse these human failings with the original perfect institutions God designed.

Rediscovering the divine design

The Bible gives many keys to developing the kind of relationships God intended. Let's quickly look at four of them.

- **Love and respect.** The apostle Paul summarized key instructions to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:33: "Let each one of you in particular so love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

Love and respect are keys to all relationships, but what this passage, beginning in verse 22, seems to be saying is that by loving his wife unselfishly as Christ loves the Church, the husband is fulfilling a deep need for his wife and making it easier for her to respect and love him. Likewise, the wife's respect fulfills her husband's deep need and makes it easier for him to love and respect her. All this contributes to a healthy atmosphere of mutual submission and appreciation to God (verses 20-21).

Learn more in our online articles "[Role of Men](#)" and "[Role of Women](#)."

- **Nurture and honor.** Ephesians 6:4 instructs parents to bring up their children in the "training and admonition of the Lord," or as the King James Version puts it, the "nurture and admonition of the Lord." Parents must lovingly teach their children how to live a responsible, godly life in an encouraging way that does not "provoke" them.

Children are reminded to "honor" their parents, in accordance with the Fifth Commandment, the "first commandment with promise" (verse 2). Learning early to honor and submit to authority increases the chances their lives will go well and last long (verse 3).

Again, nurture and honor can benefit many relationships, but they are especially helpful in the parent-child relationship. Learn more in our articles "[Raising Children: The Early Years](#)," "[Helping Our Children Grow](#)" and "[Fifth Commandment: Honor Your Father and Your Mother](#)."

Learn more about these and other biblical and practical tips for happy marriages and families in the "[Relationships](#)" section of our [LifeHopeandTruth.com](#) website. Understanding the ultimate purpose for these foundational relationships can help us see past the challenges and frustrations of today to a life full of meaning and joy as the children of God forever. **D**

Family Facts

Here is a brief snapshot of statistics about families around the world:

- "Using data from 100 countries around the globe, ... family instability is higher in countries where more children are born to single mothers and cohabiting couples. ... In other words, marriage seems to be associated with more family stability for children across much of the globe, whereas cohabitation is typically associated with more instability" (**World Family Map 2017**).
- "The average out-of-wedlock birth rate for OECD countries [35 industrialized nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] is 40%" (*The Economist*, Nov. 25, 2017, p. 16).
- Of the 17 countries with information, "between 30 percent (South Korea) and 78 percent (Argentina) of adults around the world are completely or very satisfied with their family life" (**World Family Map 2017**).

Here are some statistics from the United States:

- "In 1960, just 5% of all births occurred outside of marriage. By 1970, this share had doubled to 11%, and by 2000 fully one-third of births occurred to unmarried women. Non-marital births continued to rise until the mid-2000s, when the share of births to unmarried women stabilized at around 40%" (**Pew Research Center**).
- "While marriages are less stable than they once were, they remain more stable than cohabiting unions. ... About one-in-five children born within a marriage will experience the breakup of that marriage by age 9. In comparison, fully half of children born within a cohabiting union will experience the breakup of their parents by the same age" (**Pew Research Center**).
- "From 2015 to 2016, reports of illicit drug use in the past 30 days decreased for eighth graders from 8 to 7 percent, but remained steady for 10th- and 12th-grade students, at 16 percent and 24 percent in 2016" (**Childstats.gov**).
- "Today 28 percent of households have just one person living in them—an increase from 13 percent in 1960" (**U.S. Census Bureau**).

ADULTING MILESTONES:

THE SUCCESS SEQUENCE

The transition from our teen years to adulthood can be daunting, with a flurry of life-altering decisions and responsibilities. But here is a sequence that can lead to success.

By Isaac Khalil

Sometimes new responsibilities make you think more about the necessity of getting things done right, and in the right order. For my wife and me, the recent arrival of our first child made us highly aware of the need to make our backyard a much safer place. The two-meter (6.5 feet) steep drop just a few meters from our house that we previously thought so little about we now suddenly saw as a peril for our child.

And it was clear the original builders of our deck had done a poor job. They had failed to build a retaining wall to prevent the land from slipping and had neglected to drive the piles that held up the deck deeper into the hard clay. So now our small deck was slanting downhill.

The failures of the builder now fell on us to correct. What would have been an easier job at the time the house was built was now a much more complex job. We needed an excavator to level and reshape the land and build two large retaining walls.

We couldn't help but think how much easier it would have been if this had been done properly, in the right order, in the first place.

Doing things in the right order

Building anything—whether a deck or a life—can be difficult. But with proper planning any difficult task can be made simpler, even if we can't quite foresee exactly how it will all turn out in the end.

Take, for instance, building a house. Specific steps must be followed in a specific sequence. Generally speaking, you would:

1. Find a location.
2. Inspect it to see if it's fit for building.
3. Purchase the property.
4. Develop a design and budget.
5. Obtain the necessary permits.
6. Hire a builder.
7. Lay the foundation.
8. Frame the walls.
9. Install the roof.
10. Work on the interior.

Just imagine building a house in the wrong order. It would be silly to start step 9—the roof—without having done the earlier steps!

So why do many people approach life by doing things in the wrong sequence?

The success sequence

God does things in an orderly fashion and teaches us to also do things in order (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40). Long ago God's Word laid out the principles that lead to a more fulfilling and successful life. Modern research backs up the success sequence taught in the Bible.

The Millennial Success Sequence, published in 2017 by Wendy Wang and W. Bradford Wilcox for the Institute for Family Studies, describes a sequence of life events that leads to success in "adulting"—that is, the process of becoming a responsible grown up. It gives modern statistical evidence of truths that our society once accepted as conventional wisdom.

The Millennial Success Sequence reports that 97 percent of Millennials who followed what it calls the "success sequence"—that is, who get an education, find

work, marry, then have children, in that order—are not in poverty by the time they reach their prime young adult years (ages 28-34). Failing to perform this sequence in the correct order results in difficulties in life and makes a life of poverty more likely.

(If you have already made mistakes, see our online article "[From Failure to Success](#)" for help in turning things around.)

Get an education

"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest"—Benjamin Franklin.

A wise person prepares a plan and the means of steady income before building a home and family (Proverbs 24:27). In our modern world education is a foundational part of the plan. Whether it takes the form of a degree from a higher education institution

or an apprenticeship in a trade, education leads to a better job, higher earnings, better health, reduced stress, and greater social and psychological skills.

On the other hand, leaving high school before graduating will close doors to many occupations and can limit you to low-skilled jobs. Not only that, you will likely have the added stress of needing more than one job just to make ends meet. Not getting a proper education will likely result in a life of poverty.

And it can close doors not only for employment opportunities but also on the marriage front. Fairy tales like to portray marriage across socioeconomic classes—Aladdin weds Princess Jasmine, Cinderella marries Prince Charming—but in reality, these are few and far between.

A wise person seeks out knowledge and how to apply it based on God's Word (Proverbs 18:15; John 17:17). Education is a key to living a more successful and happier life. Young people should seek the best possible education they can access and achieve.

Work, and work hard

"A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work"—Colin Powell.

We live in a world of instant everything; everything is at our fingertips—except success. That comes only through work, and hard work at that.

Take, for instance, the basketball star Michael Jordan. He was so good that he made success look easy. But behind his success was a lot of hard work.

In his early years failing to make his high school varsity team taught him valuable lessons. He said, "I think that not making the varsity team drove me to really work at my game, and also taught me that if you set goals, and work hard to achieve them, the hard work can pay off."

So he practiced, practiced and practiced, and he practiced hard, just like he would play the game. Years later he became one of the greatest basketball players ever.

“When God’s laws and way of life guide our walk in every aspect of life, we can find ultimate, eternal success.”



King Solomon’s comparison of the lazy worker with the hard worker shows how our actions affect our outcomes: laziness leads to poverty, hard work leads to wealth (Proverbs 10:4). If we do poor work, we can’t expect success in life, but hard work and diligence will lead us there—especially when we choose our work wisely, according to God’s standards.

Marriage

At one time marriage was the norm for young people, but now there are more singles than married people in this age group.

Millennials are more likely than older generations to delay both marriage and parenthood, and the most likely to live together with a partner before or instead of marrying.

So why are people postponing or skipping marriage? Some are looking for the right person; some are no longer married due to death or divorce; and some feel the responsibilities and risks of marriage are too overwhelming. Living together is seen as an acceptable alternative, as are casual hook-ups.

God says otherwise. Though the Bible does not require marriage or marrying by a certain age, it does tell us that marriage should come before sex and having children.

The Bible shows that marriage, if done right, can be a wonderful blessing. Marriages fail for a number of reasons, including poor financial management, abuse, interference from others, immaturity, violence, anger, unfaithfulness, jealousy and irresponsibility. God’s way requires maturity, which minimizes those risks.

Only then have children

“We may not be able to prepare the future for our children, but we can at least prepare our children for the future”—Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The report shows that Millennials who followed the sequence by having children within marriage were

the most successful. Unfortunately, the increasing trend is to have children before or outside of marriage. A third of Millennials aged 28 to 34 have had a baby outside of or before marriage (up from 20 percent of the Baby Boomer generation). And if you look at just those with children, the percentage goes up to 55 percent.

According to the report, young men and women who had a baby first are much more likely to be poor—28 percent of young adults who had a baby before or without getting married are in poverty, compared with just 5 percent of their peers who married first.

Today’s norm is to have sex, move in together, get pregnant and become financially entangled before being wed. This pitfall of doing things in the wrong order leads to unhappiness and poverty.

The missing element is the commitment for life that comes with marriage. God designed sex to be a bond between partners who are married, and He intended children to be raised within that stable family.

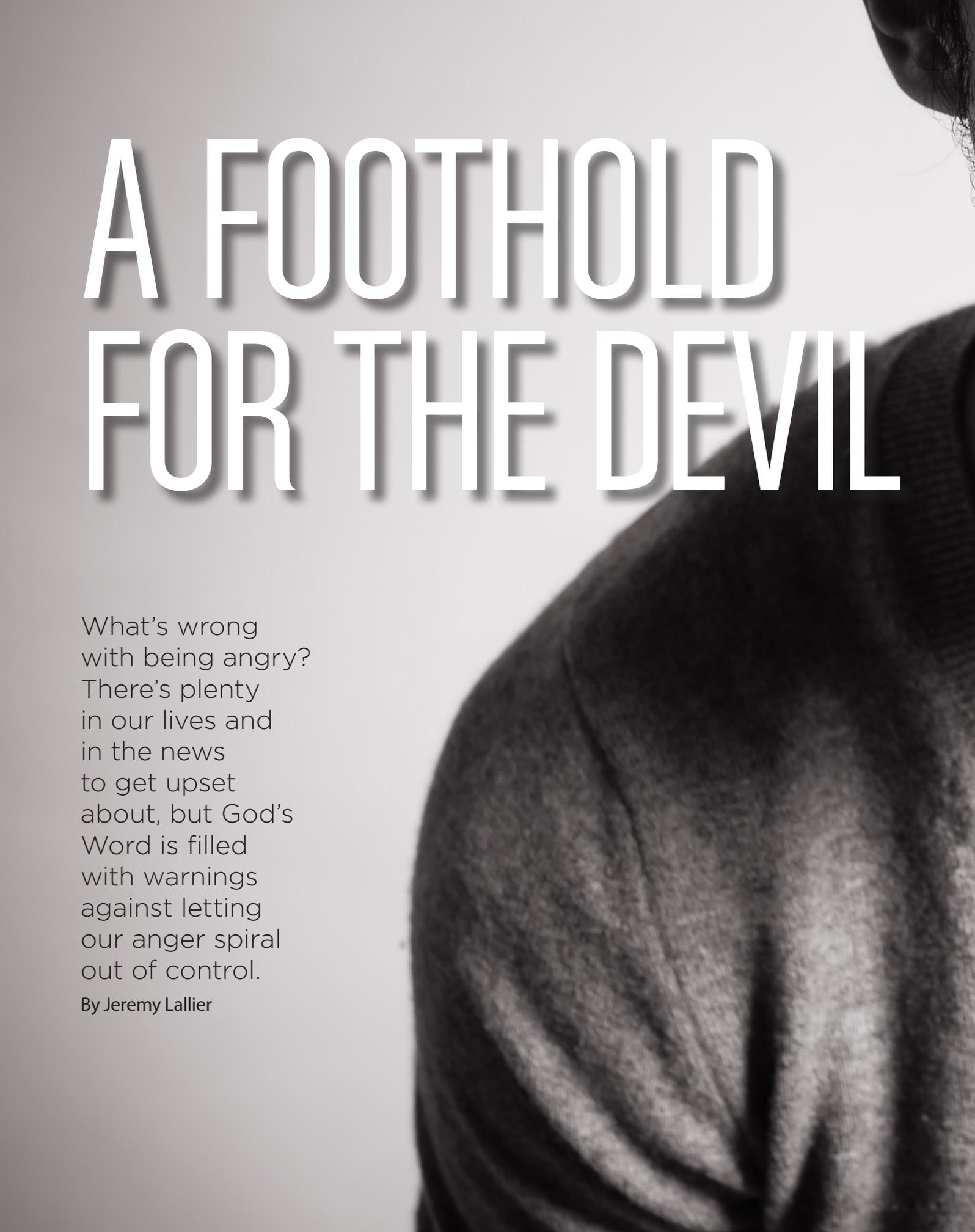
There is much joy to be found in a committed, loving marriage (Proverbs 5:18-19) with children being a reward from God (Psalm 127:3).

Another step to permanent success

This success sequence can lead us to a temporary success, but to achieve permanent success, another step is needed. The report was unable to pick up this step, since it must be spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). This step is the ultimate adult decision: bringing God into our lives.

When God’s laws and way of life guide our walk in every aspect of life, we can find ultimate, eternal success. Even if we have made mistakes in our lives—even if we have not followed the success sequence—the process of changing to follow Him makes true success possible.

To learn more, visit the Life, Hope & Truth website and read [“What Is Conversion?”](#) **D**



A Foothold FOR THE DEVIL

What's wrong with being angry? There's plenty in our lives and in the news to get upset about, but God's Word is filled with warnings against letting our anger spiral out of control.

By Jeremy Lallier



Naaman was a big deal. As the commander of Syria's army, he had the respect of his countrymen and his king. The Bible calls him "a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria" (2 Kings 5:1).

But Naaman had a problem. "He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper" (verse 1).

Leprosy. Naaman was plagued with a slow, painful disease that was gradually assaulting his nervous system and producing unsightly lesions all over his body. Left unchecked, the disease would eat away at his ability to feel and his ability to see, eventually leaving him open to infections that could rot his extremities.

There was no cure for leprosy in the ancient world. No one in Syria, not even the nation's pantheon of gods, had the skill or the power to remove such an affliction. But a young Israelite slave girl had told Naaman's wife stories

about a prophet in her homeland with the power to heal all manner of diseases. So Naaman the great—Naaman the honorable, Naaman the mighty man of valor, Naaman the victorious commander—set out to see if the stories were true.

Disrespected?

When Naaman arrived at the prophet's doorstep, his reception was a little less glamorous than he had expected. "Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, 'Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean'" (verse 10).

A messenger? Naaman had come all the way from Syria with his entourage, and instead of rolling out the red carpet for such an auspicious guest, Elisha had the gall to stay inside and send a *messenger?*

Naaman wanted a show. A man of his status deserved a spectacle.

“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

So “Naaman became furious, and went away and said, ‘Indeed, I said to myself, “He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.” Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?’ So he turned and went away in a rage” (verses 11-12).

Sin and anger

The Bible has a lot to say on the subject of anger. It’s a tricky, multifaceted thing—not always right, but not always wrong, either.

One of the more interesting passages about anger comes from the apostle Paul, who urged the Ephesians, “Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:26-27).

There’s a lot we can learn from that one God-inspired sentence. Paul was telling us that it’s possible to be angry *without sinning*. That’s important. That sentence also tells us that there’s a right kind of anger and a wrong kind of anger.

It *also* tells us that, even when our anger is justified, there should be a time limit involved. Nothing good comes from holding on to wrath day after day, allowing ourselves to get angrier and angrier.

But most important, this passage tells us that when we handle anger incorrectly, *we make room in our lives for the devil*. The New International Version translates Paul’s warning as: “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and *do not give the devil a foothold*” (emphasis added throughout).

Looking for a foothold

Here’s an unsettling thought:

Satan *wants* a foothold in your life.

It’s not just a convenience he’ll take if the opportunity comes along. Part of his battle plan is to make you angry. To make you *furious*. And not just once or twice, but over and over again, as often as possible. The angrier he can keep you, the more secure the foothold he has in your life.

The Bible describes Satan as “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others” (Ephesians 2:2-3).

All around the world, Satan is cultivating sons of disobedience and children of wrath, encouraging others

to focus as much as possible on their own worldly desires.

It’s not hard to see that he’s succeeding. Paul prophesied that “in the last days ... men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

It’s almost as if Paul wrote those words while watching our modern-day news. Those adjectives are disturbingly accurate when it comes to describing the endless parade of depressing stories that march their way across our TVs and through our news feeds every day.

Paul saw all that on the horizon and then warned, “From such people turn away!” (verse 5).

Cities without walls

The attitudes and behaviors of the children of wrath are contagious. It’s something we have to distance ourselves from both physically and mentally. And if Paul’s warnings aren’t enough, the book of Proverbs spends a great deal of time discussing the inherent problems with being an angry person:

- “Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls” (Proverbs 25:28).
- “An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression” (Proverbs 29:22).
- “A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back” (verse 11, English Standard Version).
- “The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult” (Proverbs 12:16, ESV).
- “If a wise man contends with a foolish man, whether the fool rages or laughs, there is no peace” (Proverbs 29:9).
- “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

There are a lot of harsh words out there today. There are a lot of angry people giving full vent to their spirit, laughing or raging at godly wisdom, quickly taking offense and stirring up strife. That means there are a lot of cities out there with broken-down walls. There are a lot of lives that Satan can easily walk into and manipulate for his own purposes.

If we want to make sure we don’t become one of those cities, the Bible gives us some important advice on how to shore up our walls.

Wrath and righteousness

We can start with what we just read in Proverbs: A wise person can handle an insult without firing one back. A wise person doesn't vent his or her thoughts and feelings at every opportunity. A wise person knows how to de-escalate a situation with his or her words rather than make things worse.

The more we improve in areas like these, the fewer and fewer footholds Satan will have in our lives.

The New Testament writers go even deeper and explore the core of the issue. James wrote, "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20).

That might be the most important verse on the whole subject. Being an angry or furious person doesn't just give Satan a strategic advantage in our lives—it's a path that leads us away from God. Godly righteousness is not produced by, cannot be nurtured by, is actively choked out by the wrath of man.

In other words, the anger-inducing moments of our lives offer us a choice. We have to choose between the wrath of man and the righteousness of God—between providing a foothold for our enemy and emulating the character of our Creator.

David calls God "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy"—a God who "has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:8, 10). That's what the patience and righteousness of God looks like in action, and it's a template for how we should treat others.

It's worth noting, though, that God is *slow* to anger. We saw earlier that James encouraged us to be *slow* to wrath. It's not that God never gets angry—it's that when He does, it's for the right reasons and at the right time. As humans, that's not something that comes naturally to us—but the more in sync we are with God's mind and perspective, the better we'll do.

Lights in the world

The story of Naaman almost ended when he stormed off in rage. He was angry about the way he'd been treated. In his frustration, he could have easily climbed back into

his chariot, driven back to Syria and spent the rest of his life as a leper.

Would that have been worth it?

No—but then, when we let anger direct us, we don't do things because they're worth it. We do things because we've been hurt or slighted or wronged, and we look for ways to lash out or get even.

That's the state of mind Naaman was in—until his servants talked him down. "My father," they asked, "if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" (2 Kings 5:13).

It was a reality check for Naaman. Was he really going to throw away the chance to be cured of an incurable condition just because the remedy wasn't fancy enough for him?

In the end, Naaman calmed down "and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean" (verse 14).

Naaman's story reminds us that when we give ourselves over to rage, we're going to make foolish decisions and miss out on important opportunities. The book of Proverbs shows us in great detail what some of those foolish decisions look like and the damage they can do. And Paul teaches us that, on top of everything else, misdirected anger all too easily becomes a foothold for the devil.

We live in an angry world filled with angry people doing angry things, so it's no surprise that "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). But God calls us to be different—to be *better* than that. "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:14-15, ESV).

God wants you to grow in His righteousness and shine like a light in a darkened world. Satan wants to fill you with that darkness and keep you angry and distracted from the reason you exist.

Don't give your adversary that foothold.

For more tools on dealing with anger, see our blog post "[Overcoming Anger.](#)" **D**

Four Keys to Raising **RESILIENT KIDS**



While you may not be able to completely shield your kids from pain and hardship, there are steps you can take to help them face difficulties with a can-do mind-set.

By Becky Sweat

A while back I walked up to a group of kids at church and asked them how their week went. When they answered, I was caught off guard by their candor: “Someone I thought was a good friend spread a lie about me at school.” “I flunked my algebra test.” “My dog died.” “My parents told me we’re selling our house, and I’m going to have to change schools.”

That short interaction got me thinking. As adults, we often view childhood as a carefree period of life. And certainly, most youngsters are under less pressure and have fewer responsibilities than their parents. But childhood is hardly stress-free. At times kids struggle

with schoolwork, deal with family problems, get teased, encounter bullies, feel excluded, are let down by friends, perform poorly in games, get sick and get injured.

To one degree or another, all kids face difficulties, disappointments and setbacks.

Resilience

What helps young people overcome hardship is the same character strength that helps adults: resilience. Resilience is generally defined as the ability to rebound, recover or bounce back in times of adversity. It means getting up after being knocked down and moving forward with optimism and confidence.

According to child psychologist Caren Baruch-Feldman, Ph.D., resilience is not only a matter of snapping back to one's former state after an ordeal. It can also mean coming away stronger.

"Resilient people understand that ultimately they will be strengthened by the problems and challenges they face," explains Dr. Baruch-Feldman, author of *The Grit Guide for Teens* (2017). "When we push ourselves and we learn from our mistakes, that's how we grow."

She says resilience not only gets us through difficult times, it develops best in the midst of adversity.

Our natural inclination as parents may be to try to protect kids from pain and hardship. There are times to do this, but we can't do it all the time, nor should we. Difficulties are part of life, and kids and adults alike have to be ready for them.

Peter tells us, "Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you" (1 Peter 4:12). Youngsters need to build resilience not only so they can navigate present challenges, but also to prepare for the inevitable trials they'll face as adults.

Some individuals are naturally more resilient than others. However, this ability can be developed and learned. Whether your children are preschoolers or in high school, it's never too soon or too late to teach them about resiliency.

Here are four ways you can help them build this vital character strength:



TEACH THEM PROBLEM SOLVING

When kids know how to tackle challenges, they become more resilient. If they make a mistake or something doesn't turn out as they had hoped, they're able to take it in stride, realizing there's often another opportunity to make improvements.

"Resilient people understand that ultimately they will be strengthened by the problems and challenges they face."

The best way to instill good problem-solving skills is by taking advantage of teachable moments. So if your child comes to you upset about something that happened, brainstorm possible solutions together. Ask him or her, "What do you think you should do about that?" or "How do you think you could turn the situation around?"

You may share your ideas, too, but present them as steps to consider rather than directives. Help your child evaluate all the options, pointing out the pluses and minuses of each, but let your child be the one to decide on the best course of action.

"While you should always be available to offer guidance and support, you should encourage your children to figure out what to do on their own," advises Dr. Baruch-Feldman. "This tells them you trust them to solve their own problems and encourages them to take ownership of what happened."

As kids get experience working through problems, even relatively minor ones, they'll be better prepared to face larger roadblocks down the road, she adds.

Obviously, the type of decisions you allow your kids to make and how much latitude you give them depends on their age and maturity and the severity of the problem.



DON'T TRY TO SHIELD THEM FROM ADVERSITY

No parent wants to see his or her kids hurting or discouraged, which is why it can be tempting to try to fix their problems for them. But unless they're facing something that's too big to manage on their own or could cause serious harm, we should resist the urge to intervene.

"If you overprotect them, they're going to become dependent on you for solving their problems, and they'll feel powerless to do anything on their own about the situations they face," warns Debbie Pierce, a licensed professional counselor in private practice in Texas.

Remind yourself that someday they're going to be on their own. Now is the time to teach them how to face challenges. Very often it's when kids are at their low points that they're the most motivated to address problems.



NURTURE AN OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK

Resilience and optimism go hand in hand. “A positive attitude empowers us; it takes away some of our stress; and we feel more energized to do the hard work, because it is hard work to keep going,” Dr. Baruch-Feldman says.

We can help kids maintain a hopeful outlook by pointing out the positives when they’re discouraged—what things are going well, what they have to be thankful for, the lessons they’re learning in their trials—so they don’t get caught up in all the negatives. If your youngster has endured a difficult situation for a while, compliment your child on his or her tenacity.

One teen shared how she keeps a “blessings journal.” “Every night, I write down three good things that happened that day,” she explains. “Then, when I’m down about something, my parents will encourage me to read my blessings journal, to remind me of all the good in my life.” This helps her stay upbeat.

On the other hand, don’t downplay what your children are going through. The heat of an agonizing ordeal is not the time to tell them, “Keep your chin up” or “Look at the silver lining.” Such statements can make them feel like they’re being corrected for expressing their very real feelings of pain. Most kids are not going to be ready to look at the positives until they’ve first worked through their emotions.

Saying instead, “I can see this is really difficult for you, but I also have confidence you can get through it,” validates their feelings and tells them you believe they have the abilities to address the problem.

“You want your kids to know that you recognize they’re in a tough situation, but it’s not impossible to deal with and you’re confident they can get through it,” Ms. Pierce says. This boosts optimism, which leads to resilience.



POINT THEM TO GOD

Of course, our No. 1 source of strength is our relationship with God. Ultimately, God is the One who carries us through trials, who gives us the courage and ability to navigate life’s stormy waters and helps

“Help your children understand that God uses trials to build resilience, courage, longsuffering and other strengths in us, and to teach us to trust Him.”

us bounce back and grow. But while you may know this, you shouldn’t assume your kids already have that understanding. Pass these precious truths on to your children.

An effective way to do this is to share your own experiences. After you’ve faced a trial—whether a health or financial challenge, a problem at work or the consequences of a mistake you’ve made—open up about it with your kids. Obviously, how much you divulge depends on their ages, but be willing to talk about the lessons you learned and how God saw you through.

Consider having a family Bible study on the topic of how God strengthens us in times of adversity. The book of Psalms is an excellent place to start—in particular 18:1-2, 32; 27:1; 31:21-24; 37:39; 46:1; and 138:3—along with Ephesians 6:10; Isaiah 40:29; 41:10; and Philippians 4:13.

It’s also helpful to address why God allows us to go through trials. Romans 5:3-4 tells us that tribulation produces godly character. Help your children understand that God uses trials to build resilience, courage, longsuffering and other strengths in us, and to teach us to trust Him. It is easier to hang in there when we focus on the big picture of what God is doing in our lives.

Read the stories of resilient Bible heroes like Moses, Joseph, Gideon, David, Hezekiah, Job and Peter—people who made mistakes and faced serious hardships, yet with God’s help endured suffering and stayed the course. Remind your children that God will also help them.

When your kids face their own trials, teach them to pray for strength, resilience and God’s guidance and intervention. Let them know you will pray about it too.

Jesus Christ told us we would experience trouble and hardship in this life (John 16:33). It’s important for us as parents to prepare our kids, through the relatively small hardships they face right now, for the bigger trials they’ll encounter as adults.

Remind them they’re not alone, they always have our love and support, and that God will be with them through thick and thin. **D**



The Curious Conundrum of Curiosity

It's curious how curiosity can bring out the best and worst in us. How can we cultivate the benefits and avoid the pitfalls?

By Mike Bennett

Some believe the Bible is against curiosity. Consider the results of Eve's experiment to find out if God was lying when He told Adam and her not to eat the forbidden fruit or they would die. (Actually, Eve was more focused on finding out if the serpent was right—that eating the fruit would open new vistas of knowledge that God could be hiding from them.)

Eve's curiosity ruined her relationship with God. But think about Moses' curiosity at seeing a burning bush. He was surprised and intrigued and said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn" (Exodus 3:3). That brought him closer to God!

Like so many things, curiosity can lead to good or evil, life or death.

Results

Albert Einstein said, "I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious."

Movie producer Brian Grazer said, "Curiosity has been the most valuable quality, the most important resource, the central motivation of my life" (*A Curious Mind: The Secret to a Bigger Life*, p. xiii).

Would most of the great discoveries of science have come without curiosity? Would the great artists and creative geniuses have achieved the heights of their fields without the spark of wonder and the joy of discovery?

But if our yearning to explore beyond the current limits of knowledge produces the zenith of human accomplishments, obscene and morbid curiosity plumbs the depths of human evil.

Advertisers and websites hungry for traffic tap our innate desires with clickbait like:

- "This Guy Did the Coolest, but Possibly Most Illegal, DIY Project Ever. The End Result? Genius."
- "This Man Posted an Ad Online That Could Shock (and Disgust) Almost Anyone."

We've got to know. We've got to see. And even if we resist, they have planted the seed, and we can't help but wonder...

Kinds of curiosity

Mario Livio, astrophysicist and author of *Why? What Makes Us Curious*, said:

"Curiosity has several kinds or flavors, and they are not driven by the same things. There is something that has been dubbed perceptual curiosity. That's the curiosity we feel

when something surprises us or when something doesn't quite agree with what we know or think we know. That is felt as an unpleasant state, as an adversity state. It's a bit like an itch that we need to scratch. That's why we try to find out the information in order to relieve that type of curiosity.

"On the other hand, there is something that has been dubbed epistemic curiosity, which is a pleasurable state associated with an anticipation of reward. ... That's what drives all scientific research."

Dr. Livio also mentioned "specific curiosity," a question of fact that can be satisfied with an Internet search, and "diversive curiosity. That's the thing when you see young people constantly on their smartphone, looking for text messages to ward off boredom" (Wharton).

Morbid curiosity

Curiosity can be good or bad, depending on what it leads us to think about and do.

Psychological Science reported on research that shows "our curiosity is sometimes so powerful that it leads us to choose potentially painful and unpleasant outcomes that have no apparent benefits, even when we have the ability to avoid these outcomes altogether. ...

"Just as curiosity drove Pandora to open the box despite being warned of its pernicious contents, curiosity can lure humans—like you and me—to seek information with predictably ominous consequences," explains study author Bowen Ruan of the Wisconsin School of Business at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Scientific American reported that one of the experiments found, however, that "participants who were encouraged to predict how they would feel after viewing

an unpleasant picture were less likely to choose to see such an image. These results suggest that imagining the outcome of following through on one's curiosity ahead of time can help determine whether it is worth the endeavor. "Thinking about long-term consequences is key to mitigating the possible negative effects of curiosity," [coauthor Christopher] Hsee says."

Outside influences

Educators can effectively channel the power of curiosity through challenging questions and brain teasers.

"When we are exploring in our cars, we know the wisdom of staying on the road and obeying the traffic laws. We don't let our curiosity lead us over a cliff."

“Keep wondering, exploring, looking for better and faster ways to do things. If necessity is the mother of invention, a healthy curiosity may be the father.”

But porn pushers and other nefarious sorts also make use of the power of curiosity. Of course we want to see what’s behind the curtain or behind the robe. Naturally we want to know what happens next. Certainly we find it hard to resist the exciting, the boundary pushing, the forbidden. We itch to know, we crave to understand, we deeply desire to experience what some say is off-limits and others claim will blow our mind.

How can we channel our natural curiosity in the right direction and deal with these outside influences?

Curb your carnal curiosity

When your curiosity is being tugged toward lust, gossip or any other sort of evil:

Don’t go there. Don’t let the titillating image or bawdy question get a foothold in your mind. Follow the lead of righteous Job, who said, “I have made a covenant with my eyes” to not lust for young women (Job 31:1).

Flee sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18). Don’t be entertained by it, and don’t dwell on it and allow it to fill your mind with insatiable desire to experience it.

Consider this analogy: When we are exploring in our cars, we know the wisdom of staying on the road and obeying the traffic laws. We don’t let our curiosity lead us over a cliff. In a similar way with other kinds of curiosity, we need to learn where God places the guardrails and stay inside the lines. Keep your mind occupied on the good challenges and the mysteries that bring lasting benefits and no regrets.

Cultivate your creative curiosity

The Bible is full of fascinating questions and challenges. There are more than enough wonders and mysteries to last a human lifetime—and far beyond!

Never stop learning. School is just the start, and some believe it can be a bad one at that. Movie producer Brian Grazer said, “Authentic curiosity in a typical seventh-grade classroom isn’t cultivated—because it’s inconvenient and disruptive to the orderly running of the class” (p. 14).

Of course, there are some wonderfully creative teachers who ignite sparks of curiosity in their students. But, depending on when and where you went to school, you may need to unlearn some of the ways formal education has crushed your curiosity and curbed your creativity. Even if you didn’t enjoy school, you can rekindle the pure joy and excitement of discovery.

Cultivating curiosity also involves mental effort. “For it to be effective, curiosity has to be harnessed to at least two other key traits. First, the ability to pay attention to the answers to your questions. The second trait is the willingness to act” (*A Curious Mind*, p. 9).

Curiosity can be applied positively in every area of life. Being curious can even help our relationships. Wondering how other people see things, really wanting to know what they’ve experienced and what they are thinking can help us make friends and strengthen relationships.

Curiosity can help us in getting a good job and constantly improving in our career.

Curiosity is a necessary ingredient for innovation and creativity.

The frontier of human knowledge is expanding in every direction, so you can choose to laser focus and explore where no one has gone before, or you can broaden your perspective and find interconnections between different fields that have never been noticed.

Don’t stop asking questions. Google is great, but asking an actual human might give you an unexpected insight or a new perspective. As Brian Grazer said, “You can’t search for the answer to questions that haven’t been asked yet. And you can’t Google a new idea” (p. 197).

Keep wondering, exploring, looking for better and faster ways to do things. If necessity is the mother of invention, a healthy curiosity may be the father.

Every answer brings a new question

Does the joy of curiosity and creativity ever have to stop?

Dr. Livio said, “The nature of scientific research, but sometimes even artistic contemplation, is that the answer to every question just brings about a new question. Sometimes the new question is even more intriguing than the original question, so you may become more curious about it.”

The Bible says our loving God wants us to be His children (1 John 3:1). And what does He have in store for His children?

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

God has had eternity to prepare! Can you imagine an eternity of discovery, creativity and joy?

So I’m curious: What are you most curious about? Let us know on our [Facebook page](#). **D**

Heart, Soul and 3 Components in

Does it make any difference how we worship God? Is how we feel about our relationship with Him all that matters?

By David Treybig

Many people say they love Jesus.

What a great sentiment! How wonderful it would be if all people had this perspective!

But what does it mean to love God? Depending on the person, it could represent a wide variety of beliefs and lifestyles.

Consider the growing number of Brits, Aussies, Americans and people of many other nations who claim to be SBNR—“spiritual but not religious.” Those who identify themselves as SBNR generally determine their own beliefs and forms of worship rather than participating in organized religion.

Religious authorities are divided over the implications of people deciding for themselves how to have a relationship with God. Some see it as healthy for Christianity to offer more choices. Others view it as a mistake, as Christianity Lite—the

kind where each person can pick and choose what he or she wants to do and feel good about the choice.

So how are we to love God? Can we just love Him however we think best?

Jesus said that it was vain—empty and worthless—to worship God according to the ideas of men (Mark 7:7). So, instead of selecting our own preferences from the vague and confusing explanations that are blithely offered today, doesn't it make more sense to let the Bible guide us in this important endeavor?

Loving God defined

One of the foundational principles given in Scripture about loving God is that it requires specific action. Loving God means keeping His commandments (1 John 5:3).

Contrary to the misguided opinions of some, God's laws are not harsh, burdensome, unrealistic and outdated.

After the return of the Jewish people to Jerusalem from their Babylonian captivity, they were reminded that God had come down

on Mount Sinai and had given them “*just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments*” (Nehemiah 9:13, emphasis added throughout).

Earlier, Moses had warned the ancient Israelites of the consequences of rejecting God's laws and wrongly assuming, “I shall have peace, even though *I follow the dictates of my heart*” (Deuteronomy 29:19).

Those scriptures still apply today.

We can't just do whatever we feel like doing when it is contrary to God's instructions. Confirming this principle, Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who *does* the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). And just hours before His crucifixion, Jesus reminded His followers, “If you love Me, *keep My commandments*” (John 14:15).

Obedience to God's laws is important, but there is more to God's expectations. As we'll see, the way we think, feel and respond to God's laws is also important.

Mind—

Loving God

Jesus on loving God

During His earthly ministry, Jesus reiterated an important principle about our outlook on obedience to God's law.

After being asked what “the great commandment of the law” was, Jesus responded, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:35, 37).

Jesus' answer was in perfect harmony with Deuteronomy 6:4-5—a section of Scripture the Jews have historically given special prominence, calling it the *Shema*, from the opening phrase, “Hear, O Israel.” The key phrase that Jesus was referencing is, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (verse 5).

In referring to this instruction from the Old Testament, Jesus said this was “the first and great commandment” (Matthew 22:38)—meaning it is the foundation of how we are to worship God.

So how can our heart, soul and mind work together in loving God?

Heart

The Hebrew word for heart, *leb*, and its synonym, *lebab*, are used over 800 times in the Old Testament, and depending on the context, these words can mean various things. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words* says *heart* can refer to “the organ of the body ... the inner part or middle of a thing ... the inner man ... personality ... the seat of emotions ... the seat of knowledge and wisdom ... the seat of conscience and moral character.”

Although the heart is occasionally linked with the mind (Deuteronomy 8:5; 29:4), it seems to especially refer to our personality, character and emotions. As *Easton's Bible Dictionary* notes: “The heart is the ‘home of the personal life’” (article “Heart”). When we consider all that is governed by the heart, we understand why our hearts have to be trained in righteousness (Proverbs 3:1-4; 2 Peter 2:14).

Even though our hearts can deceive us (Jeremiah 17:9), we, like King David, can repent of our sins and ask God to create “clean” hearts within us (Psalm 51:10). Through this process, our sins can be forgiven and we can have new hearts that will not lead us back into the same sins.

Practicing righteousness is what God desires us to do (Matthew 6:33). So it is good to feel bad—to have a guilty conscience—when we do something wrong. Today many mistakenly think they should feel good about themselves no matter what they do. They trust their feelings no matter the facts. They try to find facts to justify their feelings. But the time for us to feel good about our actions is when we repent of breaking God's laws and when we are in compliance with God's instructions.

We need to have hearts that are trained to love God's way of life (2 Thessalonians 2:10). We also need to realize that our emotions need to be in sync with God's law.

“To love God with all our soul means that our activities and priorities in life are all geared around God and His way of life.”

Soul

Many people mistakenly think the soul is an immortal component in humans that continues to live after we die. This erroneous idea came from paganism and is not taught in the Bible. God’s Word teaches us that the word *soul* (*nephesh* in the Old Testament and *psuche* in the New Testament) refers to life.

When God breathed the breath of life into Adam, he “became a living soul”—a living being (Genesis 2:7, King James Version). Ezekiel 18:4 says that the soul that sins will die. Since we all sin (Romans 3:23), we will all die (Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27).

When we die, our conscious existence will cease—our thoughts will “perish” (Psalm 146:4, KJV). Our hope of living again as eternal spirit beings is found in the biblical teaching regarding the resurrection of the dead—not in the mistaken teaching about humans having immortal souls. For further study, see “[Resurrections: What Are They?](#)”

The point Jesus was making about loving God with all our soul is that our lives need to be guided by God and intertwined with His way of life. *Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible* says the phrase “with all your soul” in Matthew 22:37 means “to be willing to give up the life to him, and to devote it all to his service; to live to him, and to be willing to die at his command.”

Put another way, to love God with all our soul means that our activities and priorities in life are all geared around God and His way of life. It means our life pattern will be to keep all of God’s Commandments.

We should worship the true God, avoid religious icons, stop misusing God’s name and keep the seventh-day Sabbath and annual holy days. We should strive to live peaceably with all and to show respect to all, as reflected in the last six of the 10 Commandments. They uphold the family, encourage truthful words and behavior, and warn us to control our human desires.

Mind

The Greek word for mind in Matthew 22:37 is *dianoia*, meaning “the mind as the faculty of understanding ... way of thinking and feeling” (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*). Put another way, using the mind is an exercise in thinking and reasoning.

Several scriptures indicate that the heart and mind are separate but complementary components in our love of God. King David advised Solomon to serve God with a loyal heart and a willing mind (1 Chronicles 28:9). In Psalm 26:2 David implores God, “Try my mind

and my heart.” Jeremiah adds that God can “see the mind and heart” (Jeremiah 20:12).

Some have wondered why Matthew’s account records Jesus saying “mind” when Deuteronomy 6:5 says “strength.” Perhaps it is because Jesus was trying to give the full perspective of the Old Testament instruction to a world heavily influenced by the Greek focus on the mind and intellect. (Mark 12:30 records Jesus saying both “mind” and “strength.”)

The point is, our minds must be deeply engaged if we are going to give our full strength to loving God. In addition to our hearts and souls, God wants us to be habitually focused on Him and His way of life. And when we submit to God, He assists us in our thinking.

God promises us that if we are led by the Holy Spirit, we can have a spiritually sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Being led by the Holy Spirit is important because by it we can be guided into the truth of God (John 16:13).

Three components

If we want to love God, we will have to do so as He desires. We can’t just naively design our own system of worship.

To truly love God, we must keep His commandments and do so with every aspect of our being—our hearts, our souls and our minds. As God Himself said, “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:10). **D**

“If we want to love God, we will have to do so as He desires. We can’t just naively design our own system of worship.”

Wonders of GOD'S Creation



A Bug's Life

Dragonflies spend most of their lives unable to fly.

It's true! Despite a two- to three-year total life span, dragonflies spend most of it living underwater as nymphs. It's only in the last stage of their lives that they undergo a remarkable metamorphosis. They climb out of the water, shed their submarine exoskeleton and spread perfectly formed new wings for the very first time.

And God designed dragonflies to suddenly become natural pilots. They can fly at speeds of more than 30 miles an hour (that's faster than Usain Bolt can run), and their two pairs of wings give them the ability to hover like a helicopter and fly in any direction, making it easy for them to scope out their prey. (Their nearly 360-degree vision, thanks to big, bulbous eyes composed of 30,000 facets each, doesn't hurt either.)

What's more, it appears that up to 50 species of dragonflies (out of 5,200) migrate, just like birds. Scientists are still trying to discover why these bugs were given an instinct to migrate—a behavior made all the more interesting given their life span. A dragonfly migration is a one-way trip; their children make the return flight.

Underwater or in the air, the dragonfly remains another wonder of God's creation!

Pictured here: common tiger dragonfly (*Ictinogomphus ferox*)

Photo by James Capo, text by Jeremy Lallier

U.S. Family Statistics

“About four-in-ten full-time working mothers say they spend too little time with their kids. By comparison, 18% of part-time working mothers and 11% of non-working mothers say the same. For their part, working fathers are significantly more likely than working mothers to say they spend too little time with their children—fully half of full-time working fathers say this is the case.”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

“The overall rate of child maltreatment (defined as physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect) declined from 9.3 for every 1,000 children in 2008 to 8.8 in 2011. But in 2015, the rate increased to 9.2 per 1,000 children. Rates among children under 1 year of age have increased at twice the rate of any other age group.”

CHILDSTATS.GOV

“About 62 percent of children have a mother who works outside the home, slightly less than those with a father who works outside the home (66 percent).”

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU



Christianity in Europe

“Among people aged 16 to 29, the Czech Republic showed the lowest level of piety, with 91% of that age group saying they had no religion. Similarly high levels of indifference to religion were found in Estonia (80%), Sweden (75%) and the Netherlands (72%). Majorities of young adults in Britain (70%) and France (64%) were equally untouched by organised faith. (Even in Russia, whose leaders contrast their nation’s healthy traditionalism with the decadent West, almost half (49%) of young adults acknowledged no religion.)

“But some countries remain quite devout, in particular Poland where only 17% of young adults called themselves non-religious and 82% identified as Catholic. In France, the study found, some 23% of that generation called themselves Catholic, compared with 10% who professed Islam and 2% who were Protestants. In Britain, only 7% of young adults identified with Anglicanism, the established faith of England, less than the 10% who described themselves as Catholic. Followers of England’s state religion may soon be outnumbered by Muslims who now amount to 6% of the young cohort.”

THE ECONOMIST

“I think you ought to treat your spouse like you treat your friends. ... A spouse often comes second. So treat your spouse like the friends. Don’t just go halfway. If each spouse goes seventy-five percent of the way, it’s a perfect match.”

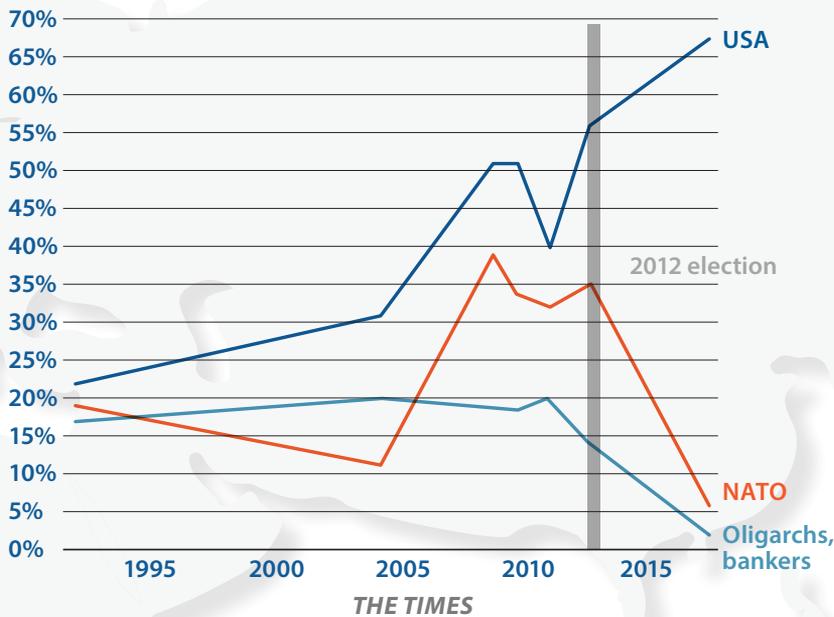
—BARBARA BUSH, married to former U.S. President George H.W. Bush for 73 years, describing the secret to a long-lasting marriage (A.J. Jacobs, *It’s All Relative*, 2017, p. 191). Mrs. Bush died April 17.

Find more about family in the article “*The Divine Design of Family*,” PAGE 4

“There have never been more threats than there are today.”

—MICHAEL MORELL, a former deputy director and acting director of the CIA who briefed the previous four U.S. presidents (*The Atlantic*).

Who Do Russians Perceive as an Enemy?



Where Will the Next Financial Crisis Occur? Corporate Debt Could Be the Culprit

“As of 2017, 37% of global companies were highly indebted. That is five percentage points higher than the share in 2007, just before the financial crisis hit. ... The median bond is now one notch above junk.”

THE ECONOMIST

Gaza’s Population Explosion

“Gaza has **one of the highest population densities in the world**. On average, some 5,479 people live on every square kilometre in Gaza. That’s expected to rise to 6,197 people per square kilometre by 2020.

“The number of people living there is expected to hit 2.2 million by the end of the decade, and 3.1 million by 2030. ...

“Gaza also has one of the world’s youngest populations, with **more than 40% younger than 15 years old**. ...

“Gaza is significantly poorer than it was in the 1990s. Its economy grew only 0.5% in 2017 according to a World Bank report, with annual income per person falling from \$2,659 in 1994 to \$1,826 in 2018.

“In 2017 the Gaza Strip had the highest unemployment rate in the World Bank’s development database.

“At 44% it was more than double the rate in the West Bank.

“And of particular concern was the **high youth unemployment rate, which stood at more than 60%** in Gaza.”

BBC

Middle East Nuclear Arms Race?

“Saudi Arabia is seeking to enrich its own uranium, prompting fears of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East after President Trump’s withdrawal from the Iran deal. ...

“Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman warned during a trip to the US in March that if Iran developed a nuclear bomb his country would ‘follow suit as soon as possible.’”

THE TIMES





Europe's Uncertain

Who will lead Europe? Recent elections vaulted leaders with radically different designs for guiding Europe to the forefront of the deeply divided continent. Which path will Europe follow?

By Neal Hogberg

The European Union, still wrestling with an unprecedented wave of migration, is now facing two other existential crises. The first is how to navigate the departure of a cornerstone EU member such as Britain. The second is how to tame the strong and growing undercurrent of nationalism, populism and “illiberal democracy” spreading in Central Europe.

A new leader emerges from the West

With Britain headed toward the EU’s exit door, Germany and France are left alone as the bloc’s political and economic heavyweights.

Not long ago, *Time* magazine crowned Angela Merkel the “chancellor of the free world” and “Mrs. Europe,” but her political support crumbled following her handling of the Syrian refugee crisis. In 2017 she was rewarded with the worst election results for her party since 1949.

Mrs. Merkel struggled for months to form a coalition government. This profoundly diminished her image to the point she has even been dubbed “Europe’s weakest link.”

The man becoming the European Union’s leading promoter is a 40-year-old investment banker turned politician with a contagious enthusiasm for the EU. Emmanuel Macron, the youngest president in the history of France, shot to political stardom as a gifted political entrepreneur. He cobbled together a new centrist party from the fragments of dilapidated parties.

The young, charismatic politician emerged victorious in the French presidential election. He defeated far-right candidate Marine Le Pen by declaring that the answer to voter concerns over immigration, unemployment and security is more EU, not less. (Of course, not everyone is taken with his youthful idealism.)



Future

Calls to reject nationalism

Issuing a rallying cry to the European Parliament, Mr. Macron warned members of the 28-nation bloc that “there seems to be a European civil war” between liberal democracy and rising authoritarianism. He urged the continent’s leaders not to become a “generation of sleepwalkers” in the face of growing authoritarianism.

Just weeks later, he demanded closer and faster EU integration toward a European superstate while accepting the Charlemagne Prize for work done “in the service of European unification” and his “decisive stance” against nationalism.

Mr. Macron urged Brussels to move full-speed ahead on greater budgetary union and creating a single foreign policy and defense strategy. He shared his vision of a two-speed Europe, allowing some countries to integrate faster while others maintain the status quo.

Mr. Macron called out Eastern EU member countries hostile to immigration and intolerant of criticism over their alleged backsliding on the rule of law. He said the “music of nationalism is resounding everywhere in Europe,” adding that division is “like leprosy.”

A leader rises in the East

But Emmanuel Macron is not the only one reshaping European politics and posing a serious challenge to German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s dominant position on the continent.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has now cemented his grip on power. His broad-based Fidesz party achieved its third consecutive triumph in Hungary’s April 2018 parliamentary election. Even prior to his victory, an October 2017 *Financial Times* editorial stated that “no EU national leader reigns supreme in the way that Viktor Orbán is lord and master of Hungary.”

Having transformed from a left-wing atheist to a right-wing, populist strongman, Mr. Orbán presents himself as a tell-it-like-it-is guardian of Christian Europe, protecting it from the globalist European project and Muslim immigration. He declared, “We must defend Christian culture.”

Abandoning Western-style democracy

Mr. Orbán’s aggressive actions to consolidate power have led some EU leaders to call him “the Viktator” and “the most dangerous man in the European Union.”

Mr. Orbán is creating “Hungary’s Führer Democracy,” according to biographer Paul Lendvai, in *Orbán: Hungary’s Strongman*. “There is not a single politician in Budapest or Brussels,” continues Mr. Lendvai, “who has been able to hold a candle to Orbán with regard to his political cynicism, his gifts as an orator and his talent for intrigue” (2017, p. 202).

Mr. Orbán has created what he terms an “illiberal democracy”—a political system with free elections but allegedly scant regard for civil liberties. He has radically altered the country’s constitution and overhauled public media institutions into partisan outlets. “We have replaced,” he boasted, “a shipwrecked liberal democracy with a 21st-century Christian democracy.”

Always direct, Mr. Orbán brusquely declared in 2014 that “checks and balances” are a “U.S. invention that for some reason of intellectual mediocrity Europe decided to adopt.” Not surprisingly, Hungary has been described as “half democracy in decline” or a “soft autocracy.” Freedom House named it the “least democratic country” in the EU.

What makes this astonishing is that Hungary is a member of the EU and NATO, yet defies the values of both.

Historic memories and bitterness

Many Hungarians felt let down by the switch from communism to free-market capitalism in 1989. Instead of being granted a long-denied sense of autonomy, Russian domination was rapidly replaced by EU mandates.

Still, Hungary is not a particularly “Euro-sceptic” nation. In advance of the Brexit vote in June 2016, polls showed that Hungarian voters, second only to Poles in the entire 28-state bloc, were the most supportive of the EU. But Mr. Orbán has played on deep-seated Hungarian grievances and a collective memory of foreign invasion by Turks, Austrians and Russians.

A gate to the West

After winning elections in April, the maverick prime minister called on the EU to “give up on its delusional nightmares of a United States of Europe.” “To our west,” continued Mr. Orbán, “is the land of German iron chancellors, to our east is the world of Slavic soldier peoples, and to our south are massive crowds of Muslim people. Berlin, Moscow, Istanbul—Hungary exists in this space. We need to make calculations based on this.”

“We also know our own history,” he said in an October 2017 speech. “Those who wanted to gain a foothold in Europe always came across this route. And Hungary was the last defensive line, if you like, a gate to and for the West.”

Sure to further inflame passions, the year 2020 marks the centenary of the treaty of Trianon. Under that treaty Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory and 3 million Hungarians found themselves living in foreign states after World War I. That national humiliation has filled generations of Hungarians with bitterness and distrust of decisions made by outsiders affecting its borders.

An “invasion” triggers European divide

The continuing European migrant crisis has exposed deep divisions between EU leaders in the West and East while sparking the resurgence of right-wing nationalism throughout Europe. The left-leaning German weekly *Der Spiegel* declared Viktor Orbán as “the political victor of the refugee crisis.”

He has described refugees as “Muslim invaders” and erected a 100-mile razor wire barrier to limit crossings from the Balkans. Prime Minister Orbán stated in a March 2016 speech: “At last, the peoples of Europe, who have been slumbering in abundance and prosperity, have understood that the principles of life that Europe has been built on are in mortal danger.”

Mass migration, he continued, “is a slow stream of water persistently eroding the shores. It is masquerading as a humanitarian cause, but its true nature is the occupation of territory” (quoted by Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe*, p. 229).

Spreading out from Budapest

In his book *The End of Europe*, James Kirchick notes that “in a remarkably short period Orbán has gone from being Europe’s polecat to its phenom, eagerly applauded for his uncompromising stance against Angela Merkel’s immigration policy ... anointing himself as the flag-bearer of those demanding a Europe with barbed-wire fences.” “The danger now,” adds Mr. Kirchick, “is that ‘Orbánism’ is proving contagious, particularly in the postcommunist neighborhood of Central Europe” (2017, p. 64).

Nationalism at the polls

A significant number of voters agree with Mr. Orbán’s criticism of the European Union as an undemocratic, overly bureaucratic body and support returning power to national capitals.

Poland’s ruling Law and Justice Party is scorned in Brussels almost as much as Hungary’s leader. Austria’s anti-immigrant Freedom Party is now in government, and Italy’s anti-immigrant League party is well-placed to follow suit. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) is now the third-largest party in Germany. In France the National Front made it to the final round of the presidential election, and in Sweden the far-right Sweden Democrats have shown surprising strength.

The fact is, as Ivan Krastev pointed out in a June 2017 editorial in *The New York Times*, Central Europe will face “a future of deeper integration with Western Europe, or a future where Central Europe is increasingly marginalized.”

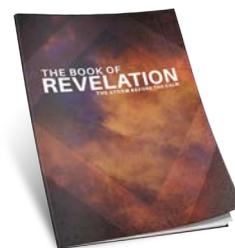
“It’s a choice between Emmanuel Macron and Viktor Orbán. ... The jury is out on which choice governments will make.” Mr. Krastev notes that “Central Europe’s 20th-century experience may be summarized by the adage, ‘If you are not at the table, you are on the menu.’”

The future political scene

Currently, the European Union appears to have more questions than answers, with Britain exiting the EU, ongoing financial crises, migration and terror concerns, and rising nationalism. Despite these serious problems, Bible prophecy reveals that not long from now a new superpower system will arise in Europe to astound the entire world (Revelation 13:1-7) as it strides for a brief period across the world scene.

Scripture reveals that this revived European power will have strong leadership (Daniel 11:3-39; Revelation 17:2-3), but one leader will claim preeminence (Daniel 11:20). Just as today, the strongmen of the future will share dreams of grandeur, but they will never completely forget their own national interests, histories and grudges. This partly explains why the union “shall be partly strong, and partly fragile” (Daniel 2:42). **D**

To learn more about this vital topic, please download our free booklet *The Book of Revelation: The Storm Before the Calm*.





WHAT IT *REALLY* MEANS TO BE SAVED: SAVED FROM WHAT?

Most Christians consider themselves to be saved. But have you ever stopped to consider what that really means? The Bible teaches that you absolutely need to be saved—but saved from what?

By Erik Jones

Have you been saved?

That question is very common in the Christian world. So common, in fact, that many of those who ask it so often don't understand what it actually means.

The Christian Broadcasting Network [defines](#) being saved this way: "The term 'saved' simply refers to the standing a believer has in Jesus Christ. With the guarantee of heaven, believers are 'saved' from eternal damnation in hell. All who are believers are sealed with the blood of Jesus Christ, and seen as righteous in the eyes of the Lord ... 'saved' to be with God in heaven."

Salvation is generally viewed as the act of accepting Jesus as Savior. Once you have done this, the teaching goes, you are *saved* from hell and are headed to heaven.

But is this what "being saved" really means according to the Bible?

In order to answer that, we need to know what the Bible means when it talks about salvation. Make no doubt about it, you *need* to be saved! But there is much more to it than the above definition describes.

What exactly do we need to be saved from, and how are we saved?

Saved from ... *what?*

The word *saved* implies there is something we need to be saved (or rescued) from. But is *hell* what you need to be saved from?

The Bible teaches that the core problem humans have is *sin*. The most basic definition of sin is found in 1 John 3:4: "Everyone who commits sin also breaks the law; sin is the breaking of law" (Holman Christian Standard Bible). God's 10 Commandments represent His character. He created us to be like Him, but when we live contrary to His standard, we sin. For example, when someone disregards the Ninth Commandment and tells a lie, he or she sins.

The Bible also reveals a clear penalty for sin: "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Even though this scripture is not unknown to evangelical Christianity and is often quoted in religious tracts, its clear message is usually read right over. The ultimate consequence of sin is the *death penalty*. The popular conception of a never-ending hell as a place of punishment was grafted into Christianity from pagan religions. An eternity of suffering in hellfire is not what Jesus came to save you from.

What we need to be saved from is *death*—the total termination of life and consciousness—because if we have sinned (and we all have according to Romans 3:23), then that is the inevitable penalty we all face. Ever since the Garden of Eden, humans have been sinning and earning death (Genesis 3:19; Ezekiel 18:20). On top of that ultimate penalty, sin also separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1-8).

So what we actually need to be *saved* from is alienation from God and sin's death penalty.

“Belief and confessing Christ are important initial steps in the salvation process, but they don’t represent everything a Christian needs to do to be saved.”

Saved by ... whom?

Once you have sinned, the penalty is earned and is placed on your record. The Bible teaches there is nothing you can do to save yourself from that penalty.

Nothing.

You can’t erase the penalty for past sins by doing good things in the future, and you can’t erase the penalty for future sins by having done good things in your past. God has decreed that the penalty for sin can only be satisfied through death. The only way you can avoid paying that penalty is if someone else steps in and pays it for you. But that could only happen if that person didn’t have any sin on his record.

That’s where Jesus Christ comes in.

He came to earth to become that Person for us. He lived a perfectly sin-free life—never doing, saying or thinking *anything* that broke God’s law. Because of this, He had no death penalty on His own record. Instead, He took on Himself the death penalty for our sins and died to *save us* from having to pay that penalty (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24).

Because He is God and He (with the Father) created all things, His sacrificial death was of such a great magnitude that it could satisfy the death penalty for all human beings. His death allows us to be *reconciled to God* and frees us from sin’s separation penalty (Isaiah 59:2), while His resurrected life saves us from sin’s death penalty (Romans 5:10). It is only through God’s grace, shown through His sacrifice and resurrection, that we can be saved (Ephesians 2:8). There is no other way to have our sins and the resultant penalty cleared from our record.

That’s why He’s called *our Savior*.

Just accept Him?

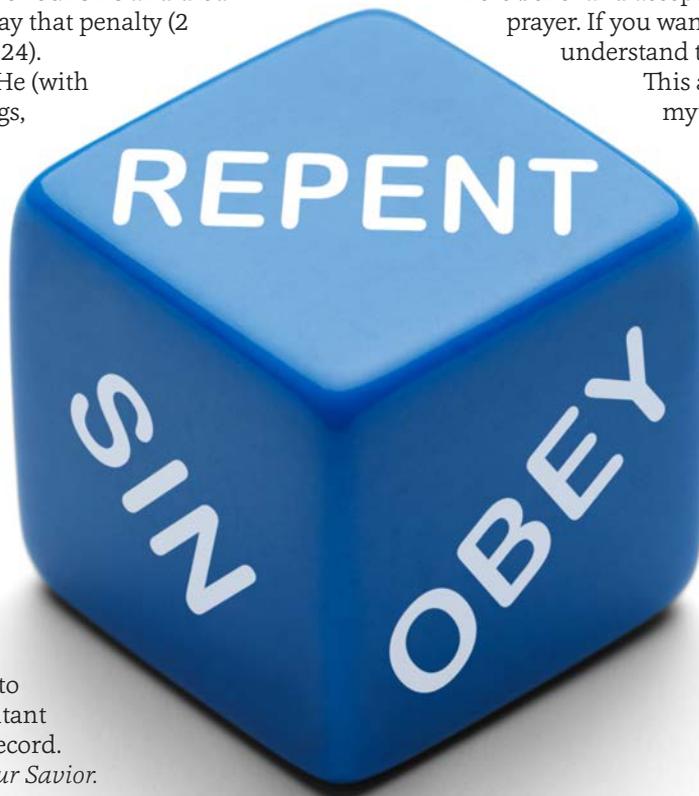
But how exactly do we accept Him as our Savior? Many preachers teach that you can be saved by simply *confessing* Jesus as Savior and accepting Him into your heart.

Mainstream Christian pastors will often ask their unsaved listeners to repeat a short prayer confessing Jesus as Savior and then declare them *saved*.

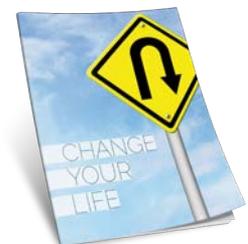
But the Bible doesn’t teach we can be saved by merely believing and repeating a prayer. Belief and confessing Christ are important initial steps in the salvation process, but they don’t represent everything a Christian needs to do to be saved. At the end of his famous Pentecost sermon, the apostle Peter expressed a more complete view: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

There’s much more to the biblical concepts of repentance, baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit than mere belief and acceptance of Jesus through a prayer. If you want to be saved, you need to fully understand these steps.

This article explored some common myths about being saved, but there are more misconceptions that need to be addressed. We will continue examining the biblical teaching about being saved in the next issue. **D**



To learn more about the steps necessary for salvation, download our free booklet, *Change Your Life*.



Eternity Calling

A unique sound heard around the world evokes a longing God has placed in our hearts.

■ A PARTICULARLY EVOCATIVE SOUND CAN BE HEARD in widely varied places around the world. I often start and smile when first I hear it. From Auckland to Aqaba, from Long Beach to Lima, from Mombasa to Mumbai, from Zurich to Zanzibar, the sound stimulates in me a reflex to *go*.

It is the cry of the genus *Larus*, the mewing of seagulls.

Where people speak Arabic, Cantonese, French, Kiswahili, Portuguese, Tagalog and Twi, the call of the mew is the same. I first remember the cry as a child on the shores of Lake Michigan, where it seemed domestic. But then I heard it at Niagara Falls and Bangkok and Loch Lomond and Le Havre. The more I traveled, the more the sound became associated with exotic memories.

Now the mewing of gulls projects on my mind a montage of all the other places I've heard such calls. And wistfully, I want to see them again. My heart wants to *go*.

A longing in our hearts

And each time, I'm reminded of a longing we humans all have. "I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end" (Ecclesiastes 3:10-11).

He has put eternity in their hearts. We don't want our lives to end. We want to live, in health and strength.

But *no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.* We want to understand eternity, what exactly is playing out. We want to comprehend the whole plan for, and all the details of, our lives. Why is this happening, why that? I'm thankful for the good I enjoy, but why must I go through these other, sometimes painful, experiences? Why the toil and the frustration and the confusion of life?

No one can fathom the entirety of God's plan, only the sweeping overview He reveals to us. There are still many blank spaces on that map.

A plan to lead us to eternal life

But God has put eternity in our hearts, a call to carry on, to see what lies over the horizon. Our Father shows us in His Word that He is only good, and He has established a plan to lead us to eternal life; eternity is attainable.

And we will finally understand all the work that God has done: "Then I shall know just as I also am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

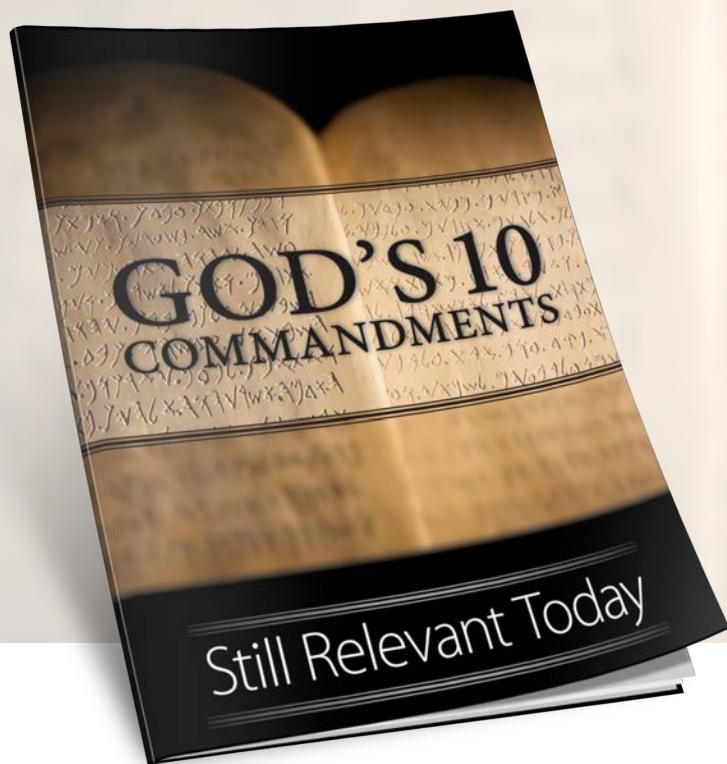
The deep longing for something more, to go somewhere better, that we all feel when we focus, that's eternity calling.

We must listen and say *yes!*

—Joel Meeker
@JoelMeeker



**This ancient wisdom
could help solve all
the world's problems.**



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