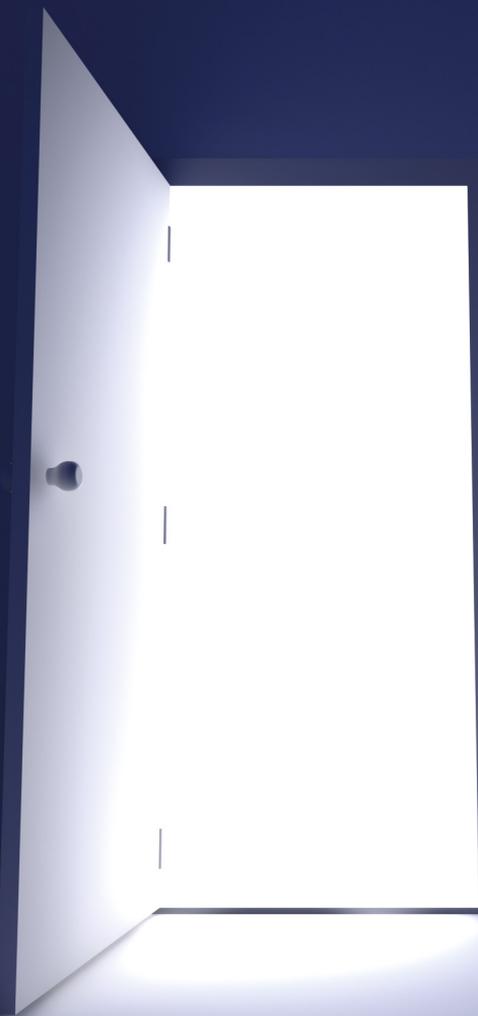


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DISCERN

A Magazine of *Life Hope & Truth*



4 Keys to
Understanding the
AFTERLIFE

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KING OF THE HILL



among these are the Sabbath and annual holy days.

It's a shame that these biblical observances were rejected and replaced by secular holidays, and it also caused a great loss of understanding. In one of

these festivals in particular—the Feast of Trumpets—God addresses the king of the hill problem. This day points to Christ's promise to return (literally to a hill—Jerusalem's Mount of Olives) and assume His position over all the governments of the earth.

The prophet Isaiah wrote, “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.”

Mountains in the Bible commonly picture governments. Yes, Jesus will be King of the Hill—ruling over all the earth.

But instead of trying to overthrow Him, this remarkable prophecy in Isaiah 2:2-3 shows, “Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’”

Several articles in this issue highlight these biblical holy days and festivals that picture and explain the events leading up to and following the coming of Jesus Christ. The Temple Mount article on page 11 describes the important history and prophesied future of the actual location to which Christ returns. “The Holy Day Satan Hates Most” (page 14) explains the fate of the spirit who is currently clinging to his temporary stand atop this world. And the article titled “Zombie Movies: What Do They Get Right?” (page 8) is really about the eventual fate of all humanity, also portrayed through God's holy days.

May God speed the day when humanity's cruel and fruitless king of the hill game ends, and the perfect King of Kings returns to stand forever over this earth!

Clyde Kilough
Editor

A As a child's game mirrors the real world, God's holy days show us what's going to change!

The kids I grew up with lacked a lot of fancy toys, but we never lacked a lot of fun. Some of our greatest entertainment was on a neighbor's big dirt pile that stood probably six feet high. There we had all that boys need for a perfect game—a chance to get dirty and something competitive.

We called this game king of the hill, and I suppose kids around the world still play some version of it today.

The rules are simple: the king is whoever stands atop the dirt pile, and the object for everyone else is to do whatever it takes to be the king. So if five boys are playing and you're on top, the other four will be doing anything they can to get you off.

The king's advantage is that being on top he can more easily repel those coming at him, since they have to scramble up steep slopes. His disadvantage is being greatly outnumbered. Against such odds no one stays king for long!

Inevitably, the king is pushed off, at which point his assailants instantly turn against each other until one claws his way to the top. Then the new foursome unites to topple the new king.

This rough-and-tumble contest was great fun until, predictably, it ended with someone getting hurt.

But life is not a game

A pile of dirt and human nature—that's all you need for a great kids' game ... and a great metaphor for humanity!

Our world's history is one of nations and leaders, politicians and people, playing king of the hill—always trying to overthrow the powers that be.

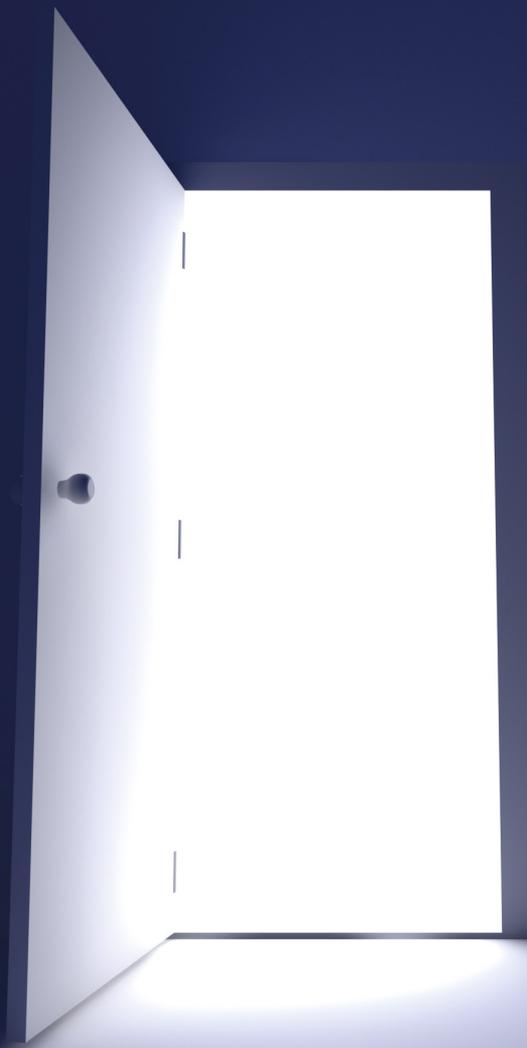
But this has been anything but a game. How many millions of people have suffered immensely and lost their lives in this continual, often violent, quest for power?

Coming: a new king of the hill

Discern readers know that we often point out the astounding gap between the practices of today's Christian churches and those of the New Testament Church. Chief

To understand what the Bible says about death—and everything that happens after—requires us to first uncover four important facets of the afterlife.

By Jeremy Lallier



4 Keys to Understanding the **AFTERLIFE**

A few months ago I lost my grandmother. It was hard, the way death is always hard. I had to come to terms with a lot of things—like the fact that our last good-bye was a lot more final than I had realized at the time. And the fact that I won't get to introduce her to my daughter, her first great-grandchild. And the fact that, as the last of my grandparents, her death marks the end of an entire generation of my ancestors.

But there was one way in which my grandmother's death wasn't hard:

I didn't have to *wonder*.

I didn't have to wonder where she is now.

I didn't have to wonder whether she was at peace or not.

I didn't have to wonder what was going to happen next.

I didn't have to wonder any of this, because the Bible lays out God's plan for us—both in this life and the next. The Christian scene is filled with conflicting ideas about what happens to us after we die, with varying opinions on everything from the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked to the descriptions of heaven and hell and the standards that determine who goes where.

But opinions don't count for much, especially when we're talking about the rest of eternity. What counts is what the Bible really says. If we're willing to dig through God's Word, what we'll find are four invaluable keys that will unlock a deeper understanding about the afterlife.

Key #1: Where the dead go

One of the most fundamental beliefs of most Christian religions is that after death the righteous are rewarded in heaven while sinners are punished in hell. There's a lot of disagreement over, say, whether that punishment involves literal flames or mental anguish, or whether heaven is just like life on earth, only nicer—but at the end of the day, an afterlife spent in heaven or hell is a pillar in much of Christian theology.

The problem is that the Bible doesn't say anything of the sort.

The Bible talks about heaven as the domain of God and the angels, with Jesus emphasizing, "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man" (John 3:13, English Standard Version).

Years later, Peter and Paul both affirmed that King David—a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22)—"did not ascend into the heavens" (Acts 2:34), but was in fact "both dead and buried" (verse 29). Paul added that David died and "saw corruption" (Acts 13:36)—that is, his body decayed and returned to dust, just as God promised it would: "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).

David, along with everyone who has ever died, is in a place the Old Testament calls *Sheol*. It's a Hebrew word often translated as either "the grave" or—interestingly enough—"hell." Over and over, the Bible emphasizes that the grave is where *everyone* goes after death:

In Ecclesiastes, the reader is warned, "There is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave [*Sheol*] where you are going" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Even as far back as the book of Genesis, Jacob understood that he would "go down into the grave [*Sheol*]" (Genesis 37:35). Job, during the most difficult trial of his life, begged that God would "hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past" (Job 14:13).

The dead, we read, go to the grave. To *Sheol*. To hell.

But with this key, we're left with another question. If Job was looking to escape the pain and suffering of a trial, *why did he ask God to hide him in hell?*

To find the answer, we have to unearth the second key to understanding the afterlife:

Key #2: What the dead know

We've already read that "there is no ... knowledge or wisdom in the grave," but that passage has more to tell us—specifically, "the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing" (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

When Lazarus died in the New Testament, Jesus told His disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.”

may wake him up” (John 11:11). Paul explained that King David “fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption” (Acts 13:36). He also told the Corinthians about 500 believers who had seen the resurrected Jesus Christ—“of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Over and over biblical authors compare death to a deep sleep. The dead know nothing. They are not aware of anything; they do not feel pleasure or pain. That’s why Job begged God to hide him in *Sheol*—because there, in the grave, Job would be free of pain and suffering.

This hell—from *Sheol* in the Old Testament Hebrew and *Hades* in the New Testament Greek—isn’t the fiery pit of torment many Christians imagine it to be. Those in this hell are simply in a state of unconsciousness, like a deep sleep. But the dead won’t stay asleep forever.

Key #3: When the dead wake up

Job asked God to hide him in the grave for a time—but also asked Him to “appoint me a set time, and remember me” (Job 14:13). Job wasn’t expecting to stay in the grave forever, because he knew that God had a bigger plan for the human race.

In a vision, God showed the prophet Ezekiel a valley full of bones—old bones, bones that figuratively cried out, “Our bones

are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!” (Ezekiel 37:11). The owners of these bones died without hope for their future—but their hope was far from lost.

God asked Ezekiel, “Son of man, can these bones live?” (verse 3). He then proceeded to give Ezekiel a glimpse into the future of those dry bones: “Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the LORD” (verses 5-6).

That hasn’t happened yet. The owners of those bones are still dead, still sleeping, still unaware of the passage of time. But that time *is* coming. It *will* happen. And not just for one valley of bones, but for the bones of every man, woman and child who has ever lived. God’s plan for the afterlife is a plan of *hope*.

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep,” wrote Paul, “that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13, ESV). He explained in another letter, “For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order” (1 Corinthians 15:21-23).

A closer look at the Bible reveals not one but *three* resurrections of the dead. One is for those who have

accepted and obeyed God’s calling in this life. The second is for the billions and billions who have lived and died without having their minds opened to that calling. And the last is for the incorrigibly wicked who fully understand God’s calling but reject everything it stands for.

(You can learn more about each of these resurrections in our article “[Resurrections: What Are They?](#)”)

All three of those resurrections will take place only *after* Jesus Christ returns to this earth, and not before. People will be resurrected “each one in his own order.” And the order and timing of these three resurrections makes perfect sense when we consider the fourth (and most important) key to understanding the afterlife:

Key #4: The reason we exist

In the beginning, God created the human race, and He did so with a purpose. He “created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).

But that wasn’t the end of the story. Far from it. When God shaped the first man from the dust of the ground, He was just getting started. God didn’t design the human race to just *look* like Him—He designed each of us with the potential to *become* like Him.

That’s why we’re here. That’s why we exist—because God wants to make us part of His family.

The apostle John told faithful Christians, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called *children of God!* ... 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, emphasis added).

Paul went a little further into the details and explained, “The first man

was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. ... And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. ... For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:47, 49, 53).

John and Paul understood that in our natural state we are mortal and corruptible. We will die, and our bodies will decay. But they also understood that we were created to become the immortal, incorruptible children of God—a precious understanding that one day all the world will share.

Unlocking the truth

Putting all four of those keys together, we start to unlock a clearer picture of the afterlife. We find that the dead, sinners and righteous alike, are all in *Sheol*—in the grave. In this state, they are like someone in a deep sleep—completely unconscious and unaware of anything.

But eventually, God will bring the dead back to life. At the return of Jesus Christ, the resurrections will begin. God’s faithful servants in this life will be raised as the incorruptible and immortal children of God. In time, the billions and billions who died “without hope” will be given new life and discover that they, too, can have a place in the family of God.

The relatively few who reject that offer and refuse to live by God’s way of love will not suffer forever in some fiery underworld. They will die, permanently. God will incinerate them in an instant in the lake of fire, which the Bible calls “the second death” (Revelation 20:14).

By removing those who insist on living a life that causes pain to themselves and to others, God will usher in a world where “there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor

crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Days to come

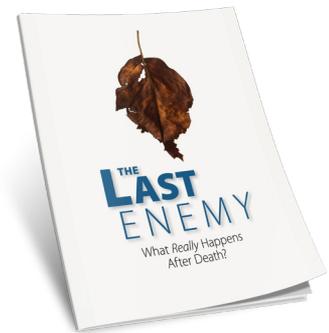
It was hard to lose my grandmother. It’s hard to deal with death any time it rears its ugly head in our lives. No amount of knowledge can ever fully take away the sting of losing someone we love—but that knowledge *can* give us peace.

Right now, my grandmother is resting in her grave. She’s asleep now, but when the time is right, God will wake her up. He’ll open her eyes to truths she never fully understood. I’ll be able to introduce her to the great-granddaughter she never met in this lifetime. I’ll sit down with not just her, but entire branches of my family tree that I’ve yet to meet, many of them discovering for the very first time that they were created to be God’s children.

And all around me, tens of billions around the world will be having a similar experience—

opening their eyes for the first time in a long time, finding themselves in a world molded by the unwavering love of God Himself, discovering that their future is filled with the very thing so many of them died without:
Hope. D

Want to dig deeper into the afterlife? Find out what else the Bible has to say on the subject in our free booklet *The Last Enemy: What Really Happens After Death?*



ZOMBIE MOVIES

What Do They Get Right?

They may be mindless entertainment, but is there anything zombie movies and shows actually get right?

By Dave Myers

Zombies. They seem to be all around us—at least in the entertainment world. But we all know they aren't real, right?

We are told that they are the walking dead, the living dead, the undead. They have their own nation Z, and they are about to unleash an apocalypse upon the rest of us. Have you ever tried to make sense of this zombie thing?

How is it that an undead person can crawl out of a grave (or be infected with a virus) and become a menace to the living? Why do they supposedly feast on the bodies of the living? How do they even know who is living and who is undead like themselves? And why do they walk like that—all stiff-kneed and halting? Are knees (and apparently elbows) the only things that stop working when you are undead?

And what happens when they finally take over and *everyone* is undead?

A bunch of nonsense?

If you are like me, you might think the whole zombie thing is just a bunch of nonsense. The idea of a dead person coming back to life? That's simply ridiculous! When you're dead, you're dead, right?

Doesn't the Bible confirm this when it says, "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19)? And, "For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing" (Ecclesiastes 9:5)? That sounds like the dead are dead—for good.

When is the impossible possible?

On the other hand, is there anything that the zombie genre gets right? Believe it or not, there is one slight shred of truth behind the idea of zombies—the dead *actually* are coming back to life!

Humans have long been fascinated by the concept of the dead coming back to life, but have found it to be impossible. The truth is, it's not impossible at all when the Creator of life Himself is involved.

God is going to bring back the dead. He promises!

Can these bones live?

As he viewed in a vision the bones of thousands of dead people, the prophet Ezekiel was asked by this Creator of life, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

Ezekiel answered, "O Lord GOD, You know" (Ezekiel 37:3). Most would give the same answer today because they really have no idea if the dead can come back to life. Isn't that the stuff of Frankenstein and zombie stories? The dead returning to the land of the living may be entertainment to some, but such make-believe has no real connection to most people and their everyday lives.

But what about you? You may be surprised to find that your Bible actually speaks quite often about the dead coming back to life. You, like most others, may

be unaware that Jesus Christ stated nothing about an immortal soul going off to heaven when you die, but rather said, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29).

Yes, Jesus taught that humans will be brought back to life after sleeping in death!

The apostles believed what Jesus said and therefore taught the same thing. "I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust," Paul declared to the Roman governor Felix (Acts 24:15).

Resurrection literally means "standing up again." Since a dead person cannot stand (even with stiff knees and elbows), resurrect means to be raised from the dead to become living once again.

In spite of Dr. Frankenstein's best efforts, bringing one back from the dead is impossible when humans are the highest power involved. But when the Creator is involved, the dead can be—and *will be*—brought back to life, no matter if they were buried, cremated or lost at sea.

A counterfeit

Sad to say, what zombie movies depict is a counterfeit resurrection to some sort of nearly dead condition where the undead attack, terrorize, kill and destroy. These erroneous ideas unfortunately can prejudice people's minds against the good news that the dead will, in fact, come back to life. But not in a condition of half-alive and half-dead. The truth of your Bible is quite different.

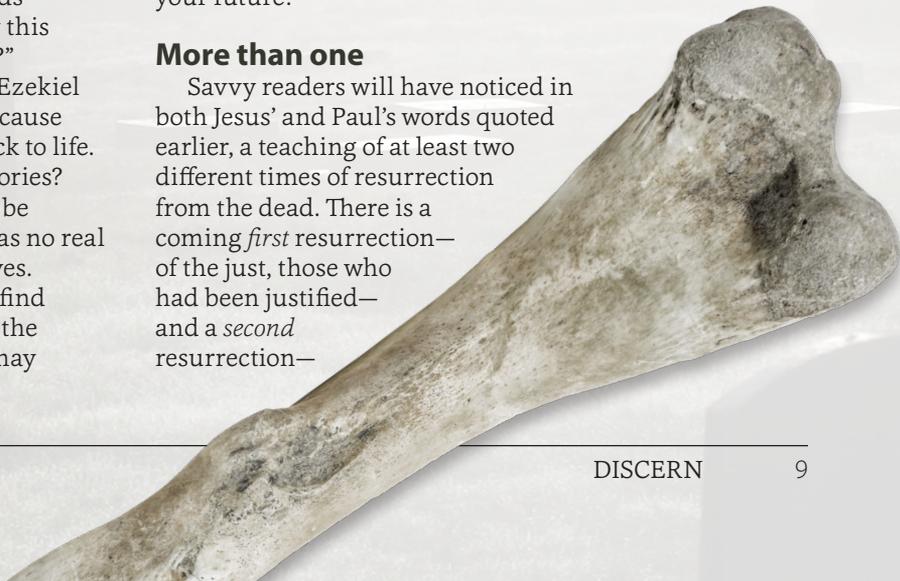
Understanding the mystery

This astounding truth is hidden from so many people that your Bible calls it a mystery (1 Corinthians 15:51). Today this mystery is understood by very few, yet it sits in plain view for those given eyes to see.

We would like you to come to understand this mystery. Your Bible plainly teaches that one group of "the dead will be raised incorruptible" (1 Corinthians 15:52). There is a resurrection, either to physical life or immortal life, in your future!

More than one

Savvy readers will have noticed in both Jesus' and Paul's words quoted earlier, a teaching of at least two different times of resurrection from the dead. There is a coming *first* resurrection—of the just, those who had been justified—and a *second* resurrection—





of the unjust, those who had not yet been forgiven. Note that since “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23), the just refers to those who have repented and been forgiven and lived faithfully.

If this biblical teaching about resurrections from the dead is new to you, please read our article [“Resurrections: What Are They?”](#)

Paul elaborated on this first resurrection to spirit life. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). We don’t have immortality now, but can have it at that time.

Ezekiel makes us aware of a second resurrection, one to physical life, for those who had been unjust. “Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: ‘Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the LORD.’” (Ezekiel 37:5-6).

No half-dead zombies, but vibrant new lives in full health, ready for what God has in store for them.

One of the key phrases here is, “Then you shall know that I am the LORD.” From this we learn that these unjust brought to life in this second resurrection had *not* really known the true God during their first life. Now they’ll have the opportunity to do so.

Celebrations of new life

The first resurrection is such a vital part of God’s plan that He reminds us of it in an annual celebration. It’s called the Feast of Trumpets. On this day we celebrate and anticipate what Jesus Christ will do in the near future. The Feast of Trumpets anticipates His return and, with it, the first resurrection.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The dead in Christ—dead Christians—are asleep in the grave awaiting the wake-up call of the last trumpet. They will not be zombies, but glorious, powerful spirit

beings because “we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). Paul adds, “We shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man” (1 Corinthians 15:49).

Revelation 20:4 speaks of those resurrected when He returns. “And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” This thousand-year reign is pictured by another biblical festival, the Feast of Tabernacles.

But there is yet another biblical holy day—called the Eighth Day or Last Great Day—that foretells another resurrection, the resurrection of all those who were not “dead in Christ.” These are the “rest of the dead” who “did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (verse 5). What happens when they are resurrected?

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:11-12).

The unjust who didn’t know God will now have the opportunity to come to know God and become just. The books of the Bible and the Book of Life, previously closed to them, will be opened for them.

God explained it this way to Ezekiel: “‘Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it,’ says the LORD” (Ezekiel 37:13-14).

If you are not familiar with these annual celebrations that the Bible calls holy days, we invite you to read [“Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles & the Eighth Day.”](#) Check them out in your own Bible, and ask God to open your mind to understand what the Bible tells us to do.

A coming reality

No, zombies are not going to come crawling—or stiffly walking—out of the grave to begin an apocalypse. All of that is clearly fiction and a human distortion of God’s truth.

But there is a coming reality—a *real* resurrection from the dead—that will give every human an opportunity to walk in eternal life! **D**



The Temple Mount in Bible Prophecy

The Temple Mount in Jerusalem has been an area of major global and religious conflict over the last 2,500 years. Many wars have been fought to seize control of this religious site. What does Bible prophecy say about this epicenter of global conflict?

By James Haeffle



Jerusalem's Temple Mount has an ancient biblical history, going back as far as 1800 B.C. when Abraham, being tested by God, came to Mount Moriah to offer his son Isaac (Genesis 22:2, 12).

The site came to be known as the "Mount of the LORD" (verse 14).

Four hundred years later Moses referred to this site after leading the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 15:17). Four centuries after that, King David purchased this site for the location of a future temple (1 Chronicles 21:18-24; 2 Chronicles 3:1).

The first and second temples

The first and second temples were erected on this site following Solomon's construction of the platform with its huge foundational stones that leveled the surface of the rounded hilltop. The first temple, dedicated around 960 B.C., lasted for about 375 years until it was destroyed by the final Babylonian invasion in 586 B.C. (2 Chronicles 36:17-20). All of the sacred articles in the temple were carried off to Babylon to completely destroy this sacred Israelite religious site (2 Chronicles 36:18; Daniel 5:2-4).

Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples.

A remnant of Jewish captives eventually returned to Jerusalem and built a second temple on the same site. More than four centuries later Herod the Great rebuilt and beautified this second temple, and it was to this edifice that Jesus came (John 2:20).

For more details and information about the biblical history of the Temple Mount, see our Life, Hope & Truth article “[Temple Mount: Its History and Future](#).”

Both temples were at the center of major global conflicts led by the greatest world powers of their times. And even after the second temple was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, the mount upon which it stood continued to be a vital site in world events.

A.D. 70 to the Muslim conquest

After the Jewish revolt in A.D. 135, the Romans ordered that no Jews could enter the city upon penalty of death. They renamed Jerusalem Aelia Capitolina, as it would be known for the next 200 years.

By A.D. 661 the Muslims had taken control of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. In 685 Abd al-Malik became the Muslim commander in Damascus and Jerusalem, and he dreamed of building a mosque, the Dome of the Rock, on the very site of Solomon’s temple. Author Simon Sebag Montefiore described the Muslim commander’s motivation in his book *Jerusalem: The Biography*, “Abd al-Malik was rebuilding the Jewish Temple for the true revelation of God, Islam. ... After it was finished in 691/2, Jerusalem was never the same again” (2011, p. 191).

The Temple Mount has remained under the control of various Muslim peoples and states for most of the years since.

The Crusades and global conflict

In 1095 Pope Urban II demanded the conquest of Jerusalem for the Catholic Church. As Montefiore wrote, “Urban saw his life’s mission as the restoration of the power and reputation of the Catholic Church” (p. 218).

In the summer of 1099 the first of the Crusades captured Jerusalem and the Temple Mount from the Muslims. The ensuing slaughter of Muslims and Jews in Jerusalem in the name of Christianity was absolutely appalling. People were decapitated and limbs were severed and thrown in the streets.

Montefiore wrote that as the crusaders “fought their way towards the Dome ... they rode in blood up to their bridles” (p. 222). This is reminiscent of the Bible’s description of the future time when blood will run “up to the horses’ bridles” in the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem at the second coming of Jesus Christ (Joel 3:12-14; Revelation 14:20).

Jerusalem and the Temple Mount continued to be the center of conflict between Catholic crusaders and Muslims for the next 200 years.

From the Crusades to the Ottomans

At the beginning of the 14th century a new political power entered as the Muslim Ottoman Turks took control of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount and held it for 450 years until the end of World War I.

Their most notable ruler was Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566) who made a lasting impact on the Temple Mount. Known by many Muslim scholars as “the second Solomon,” Suleiman rebuilt and sealed up the Golden Gate or the

eastern gate of the Temple Mount that faces the Mount of Olives.

This gate will most likely remain closed until Christ sets His feet on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-12).

The Jewish state

On Nov. 2, 1917, England’s foreign minister, Arthur James Balfour, signed the famous Balfour Declaration mandating a Jewish homeland in Palestine. That idea faced great opposition from the Arabs and the British government over the next 30 years, but on May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, declared the establishment of the State of Israel.

Israel won the intense war that immediately followed, but the old city of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount remained in the hands of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The epicenter of end-time global conflict

After capturing the old city of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount in the Six-Day War in June 1967, Israel left the administration of the Temple Mount under Muslim control while maintaining its military control. But conflict, controversy and tension continue to boil to this day.

Zechariah prophesied about conflict in the “latter days” over Israel and Jerusalem that would include the Temple Mount. “Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of



the earth are gathered against it” (Zechariah 12:2-3).

These scriptures pointing to the Jewish state in what the Bible calls the “end times” show Jerusalem with its Temple Mount will be like a “heavy stone for all peoples” because different “peoples” and nations will continually try to wrest control of it.

Jesus predicted global conflict at the Temple Mount

Prior to the Passover in the spring of A.D. 31, Jesus spoke to His disciples from the Mount of Olives about the future of the temple. He predicted that it would be thoroughly destroyed, which did occur almost 40 years later in A.D. 70 (Matthew 24:1-2).

In Luke’s account of this prophecy Jesus spoke of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies “that all things which are written [in the prophecies of the Old Testament] may be fulfilled,” and the people will “be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:22-24).

Many Jews were slaughtered in the uprising that ended in the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, but the survivors were not “led away captive into all nations.” So this statement indicates a massive invasion of Jerusalem lies yet in the future before Christ returns.

Jesus said this future invasion will lead to the “‘abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place,” which will most likely be on the Temple Mount (Matthew 24:15).

As Jesus clearly pointed out to His disciples, Jerusalem and the

Temple Mount will continue to be the epicenter of global conflict until His second coming.

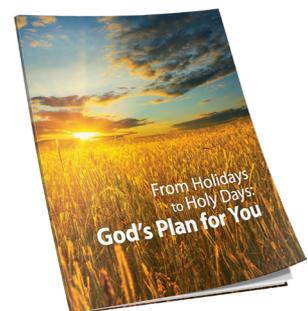
Finally, peace will come

After thousands of years of global conflict, peace will come to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount when Jesus sets His feet on the Mount of Olives and becomes “King over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:4, 9).

One of the beginning works of that time of peace will be to build a new temple complex including a new temple more beautiful than any of the past (Ezekiel 43:1-7).

The annual Feast of Tabernacles, which was kept by Jesus during His ministry (John 7:37-39), will be centered at the Temple Mount where Jesus will dwell on this earth (Zechariah 14:16-19). The world will learn the beauty of participating in this wonderful feast, which pictures the 1,000-year rule of Jesus Christ and His saints on this earth (Revelation 20:4), and worshipping the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings. **D**

If you would like to know more about this festival and its meaning, please go to the Life, Hope & Truth [Learning Center](#) and download our booklet *From Holidays to Holy Days: God’s Plan for You*.



THE HOLY DAY SATAN HATES MOST

The devil doesn't like any of God's holy days, but the Day of Atonement is particularly onerous to him. How should Christians today view this day?

By David Treybig



When I was young and just learning to celebrate God's annual holy days, the Day of Atonement was difficult for me to appreciate. While all of God's commanded assemblies are collectively termed "feasts" (Leviticus 23:2, 4), the one observed on the 10th day of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar—the Day of Atonement—had no feasting at all!

Instead of enjoying nice food and drink as our family did on the other holy days, this day was a day of afflicting our souls by fasting. This meant we were not to eat food or drink liquids for a full 24 hours (Leviticus 23:32; Esther 4:16).

While I recall a minister teaching that this holy day was a

time for feasting on spiritual food, that explanation didn't help my empty stomach. As a tall, skinny youngster with a rapid metabolism, going without food and drink for this length of time was ... well, *unpleasant* to put it mildly. My soul truly was *afflicted*—which was and is the intent of fasting.

When the seemingly extra-long day finally came to an end and my spirit revived as I ravenously partook of food and drink, I can remember feeling relieved that it would be a whole year before we would observe this day again.

So I quickly learned the "being *afflicted*" part of the Day of Atonement. What took me a little longer to learn was the positive meaning of this day for me and all of mankind. (Parents who are teaching their children to observe the Day of Atonement should do so by letting them fast for only part of the day—gradually longer each year until they are old enough to do it for the full 24 hours.)

The positive side of the Day of Atonement

One of the great meanings of this holy day is found in its name. It is a day when atonement is made. To atone for something means to make amends, reparation, restitution or compensation for something. This day teaches us that humanity will be offered atonement for its sins and given a chance to be reconciled to God.

While Christians, who have been called to repentance now, can be forgiven of their sins whenever they repent (1 John 1:9; Acts 3:19), the Day of Atonement focuses on how the amazing blessing of the reconciliation of the world to God will be offered after the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, once Jesus Christ has returned. This most generous and undeserved gift of reconciliation is made possible by Jesus Christ.

The Bible teaches that the result of sin is death and that everyone

has sinned (Romans 6:23; 3:23). As such, we all deserve death. The forgiveness of our sins upon our repentance is made possible because Jesus gave His life in our stead. God the Father "made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

As the Scriptures note, Jesus "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). We are "reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Romans 5:10).

When we come to understand the magnitude of this astounding gift of reconciliation and forgiveness that will be offered to the whole world—which we are reminded of on the Day of Atonement—this holy day takes on profound meaning. What an amazing blessing God is offering to humanity!

Emphasizing just how significant it was to observe this holy day, God told the ancient Israelites that anyone who didn't observe the day by fasting or who worked on it would be "cut off from his people" (Leviticus 23:29-30). Observing this day was obviously very important back then and still is today.

Fasting helps us realize that the meaning of the Day of Atonement is critical to our future and the future of the whole world. Physically, we are reminded that we can't survive without food and drink. Similarly, without the forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation to God, we have no spiritual future!

Why Satan hates this holy day

As our adversary, Satan constantly works to deceive us and to get us to sin, which sabotages our relationship with God (1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:9). Because he is actively trying to keep humans from becoming members of God's eternal family, Satan certainly isn't pleased



Photo: iStockphoto.com

“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

with a holy day that pictures our reconciliation with God.

In addition to the overall meaning of reconciliation with God on the Day of Atonement, there are two more aspects of this holy day that likewise anger Satan.

First, fasting done right, that is, in genuine humility, draws us closer to God and causes Satan to shy away from us. As James explains: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and *he will flee from you*. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. ... Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord,

and He will lift you up” (James 4:6-8, 10, emphasis added).

It must be especially infuriating for Satan to see humans humbling themselves before their Creator—so much so that he can’t stand being around such conduct. And if he can’t bring himself to be around humans who are drawing close to God, he doesn’t have the opportunity to work against them as he normally does.

Thus, the meaning of our reconciliation with God includes the departure of Satan from us. This departure, of course, is only temporary. Satan will soon be back to do his dirty work and to try to deceive us if he can. But for one day—the Day of Atonement—Satan loses a lot of his influence on those who humble themselves before God.

There is still one more meaning behind the Day of Atonement that is good news for humans and bad news for Satan. The bad news for Satan is that this holy day pictures a time when he will be restrained from deceiving people for 1,000 years.

Describing this future event, John wrote: “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit,

and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:1-3).

With Satan restrained and unable to deceive people, everyone will have the opportunity to clearly understand God’s way of life, repent of his or her sins, and receive salvation. This is wonderful news for humanity.

For Satan, however, it is surely going to be a time of frustration and anger because when he is restrained, he will be helpless to prevent thousands upon thousands of people from reconciling with their Creator and receiving eternal life.

A clearer perspective

As I grew older, it became easier for me to fast, and I learned what great news the Day of Atonement represents for us humans and what bad news it represents for Satan. I still miss food and liquids when I fast, but I now observe this holy day with respect and understanding. And to be honest, I enjoy it just a bit more knowing what it means for Satan and why he hates it so much.

If you’d like to learn more about this festival of God, see the article “[The Day of Atonement](#)” and the booklet *From Holidays to Holy Days: God’s Plan for You*. **D**

Two Goats and the Day of Atonement

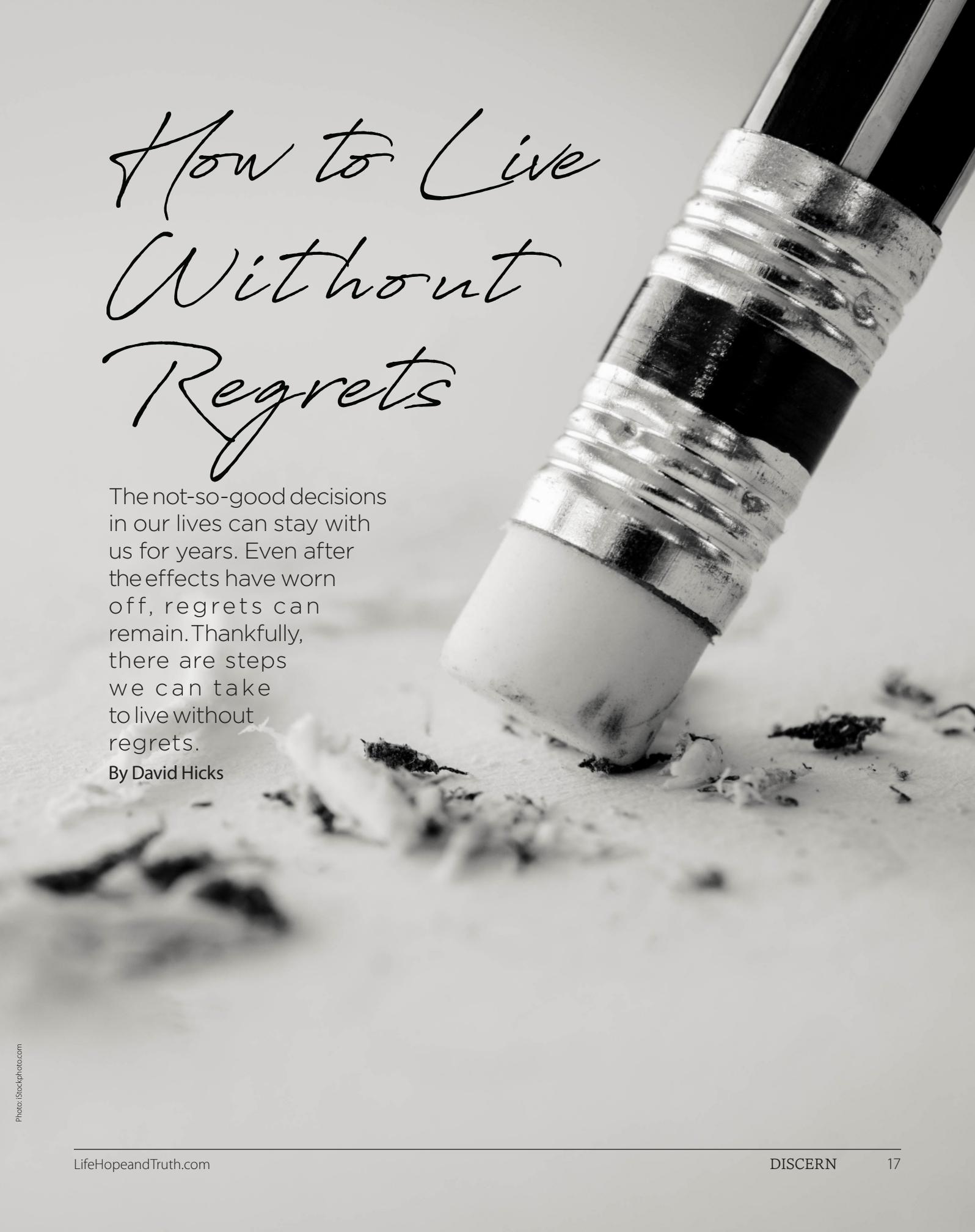
Under the Old Covenant with ancient Israel, a special ceremony involving two goats was prescribed for the Day of Atonement.

One of the goats was killed as a sin offering, and the high priest would go into the holiest part of the tabernacle and sprinkle some of this goat’s blood on the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:15-16). This goat and the ritual associated with it prefigured the New Covenant means of reconciliation with God—the sacrifice of Jesus, who would pay the penalty for our sins.

The high priest would lay his hands on the second goat and confess over it all the sins of the people. Then it was released in the wilderness (Leviticus 16:21-22, 34; Hebrews 9:7). This goat represented Satan and his deception of people (1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9).

The placing of sins on the goat’s head indicates Satan’s role in leading people into sin. The Day of Atonement pictures the future binding of Satan for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-3).

For further study of this unique ceremony, see the article “[Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement](#).”



How to Live Without Regrets

The not-so-good decisions in our lives can stay with us for years. Even after the effects have worn off, regrets can remain. Thankfully, there are steps we can take to live without regrets.

By David Hicks

It's easy to regret those "I can't believe I did that" moments. And it's not wrong to regret mistakes. However, a problem develops when regrets take control of our life.

Not-so-good decisions

Bad decisions can cause regrets. Decisions like lying, premarital sex, theft or even murder can, and most certainly should, cause regret. Whether we're rich or poor, famous or an average Joe or Jane, we're all susceptible to regrets when we make not-so-good decisions.

David was chosen by God to be king over Israel. God sought David specifically (Acts 13:22). Yet David made major mistakes as king—mistakes that displeased God and caused David great regret. Through his actions, David committed adultery with a faithful servant's wife, signed that faithful servant's death sentence to hide his own guilt and so made a widow of that servant's wife. He broke God's commandments and ultimately brought about the death of his own son (2 Samuel 12:9-18).

David had a legitimate reason to harbor regrets.

And unfortunately, David wasn't the only chosen individual to make regretful decisions.

Persecutor

How would you like to be remembered as the most notorious person ever to persecute the Church?

Saul, later known as the apostle Paul, was that persecutor. Saul approved of Stephen being stoned to death and also "made havoc of the church" (Acts 8:3). Many in the early Church were imprisoned, and some were put to death, all because of Saul's persecution (Acts 9:1; 26:10).

If anyone had a reason to be filled with lasting regret, it was the man who became the apostle Paul!

So why wasn't he?

How did Paul surmount the regrets of his past? And how did David overcome the regretful tragedies *he* triggered?

Overcoming regrets

First, let's look at David. He could have allowed the effects of his bad decisions to separate him from God—but he didn't. David took his regrets *to* God.

We all make bad decisions. It's what we do afterward that determines the direction of our life. We're not condemned to a life of self-loathing with no hope of clemency.

What did David do when he had that "I can't believe I did that" moment? David humbled himself before God. The prayer of David in Psalm 51 shows us three primary steps to removing regrets. These steps are:

Acknowledgment: David confessed he had sinned against God. He also admitted that God was a just and blameless judge, which is important for us to remember when we suffer the consequences of our bad decisions (verses 3-4).

Repentance: David began his prayer by asking for mercy—for forgiveness. David realized he couldn't recover and move forward without God's help. He needed God to cleanse him from his sin (verses 1-2). We, too, need to ask for God's forgiveness, and the forgiveness of those affected, when we make mistakes that cause offense (1 John 1:9).

Commitment: David asked God to deliver him from his guilt and restore his joy. In return, he would praise God's righteousness and teach others to do the same (Psalm 51:12-15). To remove regret, we must change—be converted—and understand that our righteous Father has given us new life and then strive to become a *positive example* to others through our words and actions. These examples will go a long way toward helping those affected by our wrong decisions to heal and have forgiveness as well. For a better understanding of forgiveness, see the sidebar "Six Steps to Forgiveness."

David overcame regret through his faith in God's forgiveness and by the understanding of his calling to be a righteous example to all.

From persecutor to apostle

So how did Paul live a life without unbearable regrets?

Paul acknowledged his past (1 Corinthians 15:9). He also recognized that his calling was not by his own deeds but by the "grace of God" that helped him to labor "more abundantly" (verse 10). Paul's true repentance and acceptance of God's Holy Spirit allowed him to see past himself—to see God's plan for his life.

Without *true* repentance, Paul would have only been left with regret. The difference between repentance

Six Steps to Forgiveness

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you needed to ask for forgiveness from God and others? Here are a few steps to remember:

- **Accept responsibility:** The first step in obtaining forgiveness is admitting we did something wrong. Too often people fall into the denial or “blame game” mind-set when they do something that affects others. God’s Word tells us, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).
- **Repent:** Once we’ve admitted we made a mistake, our next step should be to go to God. Nothing is more important than letting our Father know we realize we messed up and want to be right with Him. We must express godly sorrow and ask to have our sins covered by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. To repent means to change—to show determination not to repeat the sinful thoughts and actions.
- **Ask for forgiveness:** Asking someone to forgive us for what might be a serious situation can be stressful and even frightening. When faced with the daunting task of asking for forgiveness, remember the words recorded by the apostle Paul: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). Asking God for help and peace during this task can make asking others for forgiveness easier.
- **Be reconciled:** The act of being reconciled or making restitution is a key element to forgiveness. Scripture shows us the importance of making things right with our brother before we can have a right relationship with our Heavenly Father (Matthew 5:23-24). Restitution can take many forms. It might mean restoring money or personal property or even trying to mend the pain caused by hurtful words. Whatever can be done to correct a situation *must* be done, or the other person is not likely to forgive and reconcile.
- **Pray for a forgiving heart:** Just because we follow the previous steps doesn’t mean the person we’ve offended will be ready and willing to forgive us. It’s important to also pray for the other party to have a forgiving heart. The prayers of the righteous can have a positive effect (see our online article “[Five Keys to Answered Prayers](#)”).
- **Accept the outcome:** We can follow every step for forgiveness and still not be able to wipe away the hurt feelings and mistrust the other person experiences. He or she may still lack the willingness to forgive us. If this is the case, and we’ve done everything in our power to make the situation right, then the rest is up to God. God heals the brokenhearted and binds their wounds (Psalm 147:3), but everyone has the responsibility of going to God for healing. At this point our responsibility is to continue to pray for the right mind-set in everyone involved (including ourselves) and to show the right example moving forward.

Forgiveness is a godly trait. Our Father shows us forgiveness when we seek it properly, and He also provides guidance on how to give and receive forgiveness. Forgiveness is a key element of God’s plan for humanity. Study more in our online articles “[How to Repent](#)” and “[What Is Forgiveness?](#)”

and regret is that repentance leads to physical and spiritual change, while regret only leads to remorse and guilt. “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Paul found a way to move beyond regrets by repenting and then accepting that the old things had passed away through Jesus Christ’s forgiveness (2 Corinthians 5:16-19). Paul put his past behind him and kept his eyes on what he could change, not the things he couldn’t (Philippians 3:13).

Hope for living without regrets

The steps taken by David to overcome his regrets are the same steps taken by the apostle Paul to move beyond his past. We, too, have the ability to follow these same steps.

Yes, regrets have a way of sticking around far longer than the mistakes that cause them. Regrets can also make us feel worthless or unable to make amends. The great news is that there’s hope for moving past our regrets. We must accept the fact that we’ve messed up—that we’ve negatively affected the lives of others, our own lives and, most important, our relationship with our Father in heaven. We must ask our gracious, just Creator for forgiveness, as well as ask for forgiveness from others we’ve affected. And we must have *faith* in God’s mercy.

We all make bad decisions. It’s what we do afterward that determines the direction of our life. We’re not condemned to a life of self-loathing with no hope of clemency—if, that is, we move forward, striving to be better, striving to overcome, striving to live each day as a righteous example to others. By following these steps, we can *truly* remove regrets. **D**

SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIP

The Bible shows what we should look for in a friend—which is also what we should be as a godly friend. Here are six characteristics.

By Becky Sweat



leafed through the mail—a stack of credit card offers, community newspapers, coupon mailers and grocery store flyers. At first glance, I didn't see anything too exciting. But then I noticed a small beige envelope poking out of one of the newspapers. It was a card from a dear friend.

I quickly opened the card and read it as I walked back to my house. My friend knew about some disappointments I had faced recently, and she had written a note to offer encouragement. As I read her words—*I'm thinking of you and want you to know I'm here for you whenever you need me and I'm praying for you*—I was reminded of this verse: “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

My friend's note was just the boost I needed, and it made me reflect on what a blessing she has been to me. As long as I've known her, she's been someone I could lean on for support.

It also got me thinking about the whole concept of friendship.

Modern friendships

We live in a world where friendship is often defined as our friends and followers on social networking sites. We interact with others by posting vacation photos and updates about our kids' accomplishments, and sharing recipes and animal videos. But while these things can help us stay connected on some level, they're hardly the building blocks of a close relationship.

In many ways, our modern lifestyles actually work against friendship. Just about everyone is overbusy, overstretched and overscheduled. Between work, classes, household chores and family commitments, there isn't a lot of time left to develop or nurture friendships. Small talk with coworkers or text messages to say “hi” may be all we manage to fit in.

To be sure, even brief interactions can brighten our day. Yet God

created us to need more than just superficial social ties. We need true, biblical friendships.

Biblical friendships

This is the kind of companionship Solomon described in Ecclesiastes 4:9, 11-12. He wrote, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. ... Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. ... Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.”

True friends stay by our sides not only to have fun, but also to support and motivate us as we run the race God has set before us. There can be a shared commitment to God's way of life and a desire to please and glorify Him by how we live our lives. That is the essence of biblical companionship.

I'm an extreme extrovert, so I enjoy any kind of contact with people—from conversations with store clerks who hardly know me, to my deepest secrets confided to lifelong friends, and everything in between. Even so, I find there is something really special about people like the woman mentioned in the introduction. I count them as true, godly friends.

What makes these friendships so precious? I think it comes down to the following six characteristics.

1. UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

We've probably all encountered people who stick around only when it's convenient or when they're getting what they want out of the relationship. Nevertheless, Proverbs 17:17 says, “A friend loves at all times.” True friends choose to focus on what they can *give* to each other, rather than on what they might *get*.

I have a friend who immediately comes to mind in this regard. There have been times when we've been

together and I was preoccupied, tired or a bit edgy, or said something that rubbed her the wrong way. Yet the next time I saw her, she still had a huge smile and a hug for me, and perhaps an invitation to dinner as well. There's a security in this kind of friendship—to know someone's not going to give up on us—even when we might not always be pleasant to be around.

The ultimate example of unconditional love is Jesus Christ, who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). He voluntarily laid down His life for the benefit of unworthy mankind. If we are to have biblical friendships, we must do the same. We must love others self-sacrificially, whether or not it's deserved and without expecting anything in return.

2. SUPPORT DURING TRIALS

Very often, our natural inclination is to stay clear of people who are facing difficult circumstances.

Why? “We're afraid sometimes to enter into others' pain because we know it's possible we might say the wrong thing or we might not have the right answers. But mostly, I think, we're afraid of the burden,” writes Christine Hoover in *Messy Beautiful Friendship* (2017). She calls adversity the “litmus test of friendship” because it asks us to “willingly enter someone else's pain.”

The second part of Proverbs 17:17 states that “a brother is born for adversity.” True friends are willing to endure discomfort so they can be there for each other when needed.

This might mean being a good listener to someone who needs to talk, praying or fasting about another's situation, sending notes of encouragement, providing practical



help like supplying meals, or simply sitting quietly with a hurting friend who may not want to talk but still doesn't want to be alone. When we show this kind of support, we can't help but feel more bonded together.

3. GENUINE HAPPINESS FOR EACH OTHER'S SUCCESSES

Romans 12:15 says to "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." Sharing another's pain isn't something people typically want to do, but the first half of this verse can be just as unnatural. Many times in our dog-eat-dog world, people find themselves competing with friends, sinking to envy if a companion one-ups them.



In stark contrast, godly friends rejoice in each other's achievements, successes and blessings. Each person wants the other to do well, even if it means being outshined by him or her. Godly friends find true happiness in each other's happiness, always cheering the other on to do his or her very best.

4. EDIFYING CONVERSATIONS

I am grateful to have friends I can get together with, and afterward feel uplifted, refreshed and motivated to tackle new challenges. That is the way godly friends affect us.



Godly friends engage in meaningful conversations to clarify and deepen their understanding of God's Word (Proverbs 27:17; Malachi 3:16).

It's not that everything said has to be deep or profound. But with a true, biblical friendship, it never seems awkward to talk about God's plan and what He is doing in our lives. Personally, I consider it a huge blessing to have friends I can talk with about Bible topics I've been studying, experiences that have taught me spiritual lessons, or dilemmas I'm facing. I appreciate being able to get their perspectives.

5. GENTLE CORRECTION

True friends will go a step further and offer sincere, loving correction when it's called for. "This gentle honesty is



something that sets true friendships apart from superficial ones," notes Mary Halpin, a clinical psychologist in Deerfield, Illinois. "A more casual friend probably won't risk saying something that might upset you. But a real friend will be willing to bring these issues up, not to judge or belittle you, but out of genuine concern."

Proverbs 27:5-6 tells us, "Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Godly friends will tell you if you are making a serious mistake in your life—even if it stings a bit. We all have blind spots, and sometimes we need another set of spiritual eyes to help us stay on the right path.

Should we point out every little fault or idiosyncrasy of our friends? No, of course not. Usually our close friends are willing to overlook our flaws, and that's something we can be thankful for. However, when what we're doing is negatively impacting our spiritual lives or the people we love, that's a different matter. True friends will confront us and urge us to change direction.

6. TIME TOGETHER

In order to support others, we have to be aware of what's going on in their lives. We can't possibly know what other people's struggles, concerns, challenges, hopes and dreams are if we don't make the time to engage in real conversations with them.



"There may be people you know who you really like, but if you don't spend quality, one-on-one time with them, you're never going to move from a 'casual connection' to something more meaningful," Dr. Halpin says.

Granted, life may be crazy busy. Still, most of us can probably find more time for friends just by being more intentional about it. For instance, I routinely schedule phone chats with long-distance friends (which often happen while I'm folding clothes or making dinner) and "coffee dates" with local friends. Even if all we can manage is one in-depth conversation every couple months, I've found that can still go a long way in maintaining close connections.

It's not that casual or purely social friendships don't matter; they do. The point is that if you don't also have biblically based friendships, you are missing out. God wants us to experience friendships that inspire and encourage us to persevere and grow. And it's a two-way street; friendships also give us the opportunity to support and enrich the lives of our friends.

I have a plaque in my office that says, "Friends are God's way of taking care of us." I totally believe that's true. We are going to face challenges and trials, make mistakes, fall short and feel discouraged at times. It is our close friendships with others in the faith, along with our foundational relationship with God, that help get us through life's ups and downs. **D**

Wonders of GOD'S Creation

Windmills and Whale Fins

What can the humpback whale teach us about designing efficient wind turbines? Quite a lot, actually!

God designed humpbacks with powerful fins lined with tubercles—a series of large, irregular bumps that give these enormous sea mammals an incredible amount of control. Water passing between a humpback's tubercles maintains even channels, allowing humpbacks to keep their grip on the water at sharper angles and turn circles tight enough to produce nets of bubbles only five feet

across—“like a school bus pirouetting underwater,” says the Biomimicry Institute. Scientists are now learning from the design of the whale's fin to make more efficient turbines.

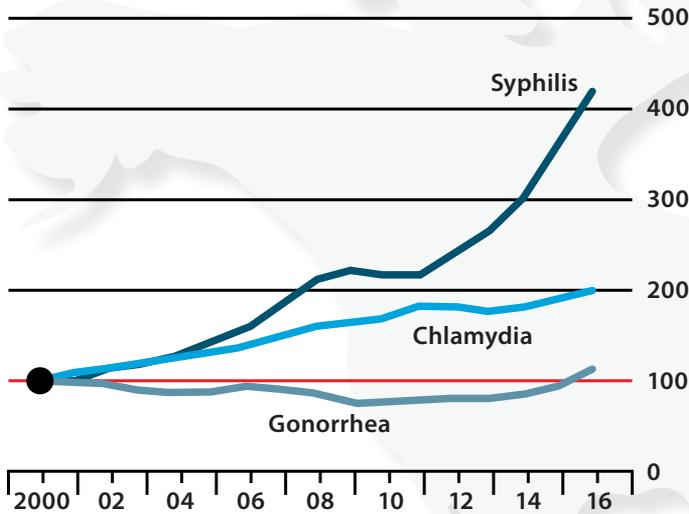
Measuring up to 50 feet long and weighing in at almost 80,000 pounds, these animals are capable of 5,000-mile migrations, diving more than 650 feet and launching themselves above the surface in extreme acrobatic displays. God's fingerprints are all over this majestic whale!

Pictured here: Cow and calf humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

By James Capo and Jeremy Lallier

SURGING STDs

UNITED STATES, SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE INFECTION RATES, 2000=100



"America is not the only place where STDs are surging. In 2017 England saw a 20% increase in syphilis and a 22% increase in gonorrhoea. It was also the site of the first antibiotic-resistant strain of gonorrhoea. In Western Europe, rates of STDs have seen similarly large increases (more than 50% in some countries) from 2010 to 2014. This suggests that changing sexual mores ... might be to blame."

THE ECONOMIST

Deadly Tensions Rise as India's Water Supply Runs Dangerously Low

"A government report ... said that India was experiencing the worst water crisis in its history, threatening millions of lives and livelihoods. Some 600 million Indians, about half the population, face high to extreme water scarcity conditions, with about 200,000 dying every year from inadequate access to safe water, according to the report. By 2030, it said, the country's demand for water is likely to be twice the available supply."

NEW YORK TIMES



Photo: iStockphoto.com
Illustration: David Hicks

The Artificial Intelligence Revolution?

"The best estimates today suggest that the human brain has an effective computing power of about ten to 100 petaflops (quadrillions of operations per second). As it happens, the most powerful computers in the world right now are also rated at about ten to 100 petaflops. Unfortunately, they're the size of living rooms, cost more than \$200 million, and generate electricity bills in the neighborhood of \$5 million. ...

"[AI experts] predicted about a 50 percent chance that AI would be able to perform all human tasks by 2060, with Asian respondents figuring that it could do so closer to 2045."

—KEVIN DRUM, FOREIGN AFFAIRS

In this age of technology revolution, what differentiates humans from artificial intelligence? See our online blog posts "[Could Robots Replace Human Beings?](#)" and "[Why Robots Will Never Be Human.](#)"

“Past periods of protectionism in U.S. history have actually been associated with subsequent dollar weakness, not dollar strength.”

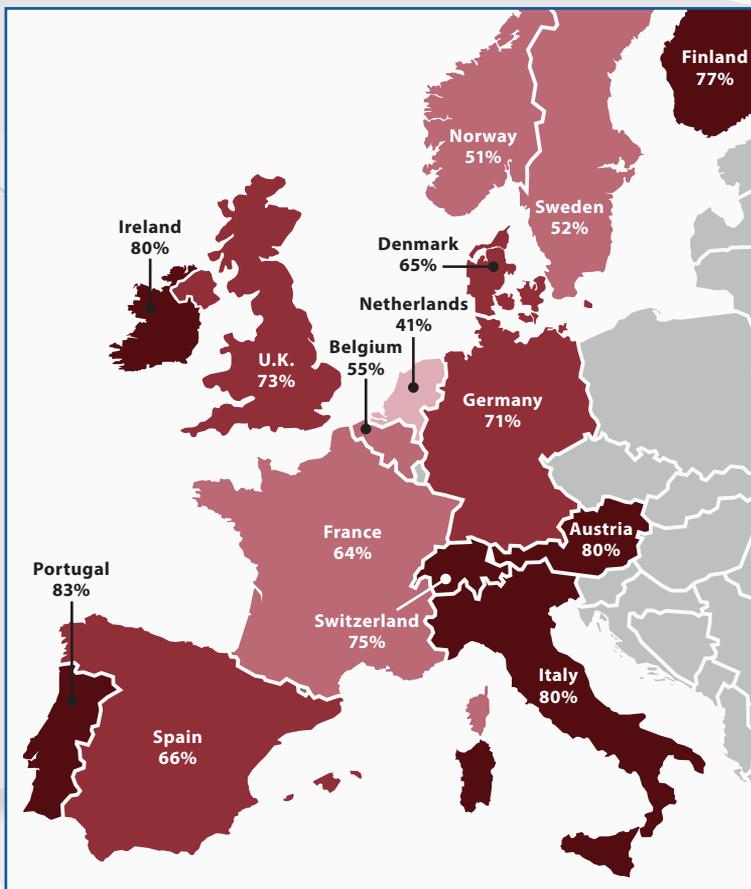
—ZACH PANDL, cohead of global FX strategy at Goldman Sachs.

BLOOMBERG

Majorities Across Western Europe Identify as Christian

% WHO SAY THEY ARE CHRISTIAN

0-49% 50-64% 65-74% 75%+ Nonsurveyed country



Note: Respondents were asked “What is your present religion, if any? Are you Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else or nothing in particular?”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

45 Tons

Amount of Japan’s plutonium holdings, which translates to nearly 9,000 nuclear bombs’ worth. China has expressed concern that Japanese plutonium could be diverted for nuclear weapons. Japan is the only nonnuclear weapon nation allowed to reprocess spent nuclear fuel, though countries like Saudi Arabia and South Korea also have requested permission.

BULLETIN OF THE ATOMIC SCIENTISTS AND NIKKEI ASIAN REVIEW

New Zealand Becoming an Increasingly Secular Nation

“More than half of Kiwis (55%) do not identify with any main religion. One in five have spiritual beliefs (20%) whilst more than one in three (35%) do not identify with any religion or spiritual belief. A third of Kiwis (33%) identify with Christianity (either Protestant or Catholic), whilst another 6% identify with other major religions. These results show that New Zealand is a largely secular nation.”

FAITH AND BELIEF IN NEW ZEALAND

Religion in Australia Not Dead Yet

The “Faith and Belief in Australia” study shows that two-thirds of Australians (68 percent) currently follow a religion or have spiritual beliefs. But almost one in three (32 percent) now do not identify with a religion.

Only one in five Australians (20 percent, across all beliefs) are extremely or very active in their religion or worshipping as part of a group.

FAITH AND BELIEF IN AUSTRALIA

Transatlantic Turmoil Escalates

For 70 years now the military and economic partnership between the United States and Western Europe has produced unparalleled peace and prosperity. Now a growing rift threatens that alliance, and many question whether it can or should survive. Where will this divide lead?
By Neal Hogberg



When German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Donald Trump shortly after he took office, the new U.S. president, according to officials, immediately stirred the pot, brashly declaring, “Angela, you owe me a trillion dollars.”

That was his estimate of what Germany agreed to contribute to its own defense under a North Atlantic Treaty Organization arrangement versus what it actually spent over the past 14 years.

Since then, Mrs. Merkel has issued her own barbs that Europe can no longer count on the United States and must take matters into its own hands.

The divide between these two leaders has often been painfully visible, as Mr. Trump has made the German chancellor one of his favorite rhetorical targets, often assailing Germany's anemic defense, trade and migrant policies.

At the NATO summit in July the president raised the level of contention, shellacking Germany for being "totally controlled by Russia" because of its dependence on the Kremlin's monopoly on energy.

Labeling the EU "a foe" on trade

"Since the Soviet collapse," according to *The Economist*, "the sense of threat has receded and the barriers to working together have risen." Because of this, "the Western alliance is in trouble. That should worry Europe, America and the world."

Foreign Policy went even further, announcing, "RIP [Rest in Peace] the Trans-Atlantic Alliance, 1945-2018."

Differing priorities, divergent beliefs and clashing political cultures have fueled a dangerous escalation in the war of words. President Trump lashed out at the European Union for allegedly ripping off the U.S. on trade and freeloading on security. He even stated that the EU is "a foe" on trade, "set up to take advantage of the United States, to attack our piggy bank."

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker—whom Mr. Trump has also sharply disparaged—voiced Europe's need "to replace the United States, which as an international actor has lost vigor, and because of it, in the long term, influence."

Donald Tusk, president of the European Council, echoed that blast, chastising the American president by saying:

- "With friends like that [President Trump], who needs enemies?"
- "He is on a mission against what we stand for."
- "Dear America, appreciate your allies. After all, you don't have that many."

Economic giants across the Atlantic

Because nearly one-third of the global trade in goods occurs between the EU and the United States, a transatlantic rift morphing into a trade war would have enormous impact. U.S.-EU trade totaled nearly \$1.1 trillion in 2016, with the U.S. running a trade deficit with the EU of \$92 billion that year.

The EU's 500 million consumers make it America's largest export market. It buys nearly \$270 billion in goods from the U.S.—more than twice the total U.S. exports to China—and over \$230 billion in services. With over 70 percent of all foreign direct investment into the U.S. coming from the EU (a figure that has doubled in the last 15 years), Europe is also the largest investor in the American economy. (Though the numbers for the EU will change with Brexit, the percentages for all of Europe remain the same.)

Quarrels between friends

This is not the first time the U.S.-Europe bond has been tested. The Suez Crisis of 1956, when President Dwight Eisenhower had a tense standoff with Britain and France over control of the Suez Canal, tried the relationship. The 1980s saw President Ronald Reagan's planned deployment of midrange nuclear missiles to Europe trigger an eruption of protests and division. And the Iraq War in 2003 stirred deep anti-American sentiment on the continent.

But as Nicholas Burns, a career diplomat who served in the George W. Bush administration, noted in *The Wall Street Journal*, "In each of those three crises, neither side felt that either one was abandoning the West, abandoning the basic contract that we're allies" (quoted by Gerald Seib).

The divergence between American and European policy now, however, is occurring much more often and with increasing emotion. Less than two years into his presidency Mr. Trump has brazenly disrupted the status quo, pulling out of the Paris climate agreement, recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal and placing tariffs on European aluminum and steel.

Media fans the flames

European media took a strident stand against President Trump even before his election. According to a recent Harvard Kennedy School study of global media, 98 percent of German public television news portrays him negatively, making it by far the most anti-Trump media in the world.

The highly respected German weekly *Der Spiegel* has recently featured incendiary articles titled, "The Enemy in the White House" and "Time for Europe to Join the Resistance."

Not surprisingly, according to Pew Research, a majority of Germans—compared to a small minority of Americans—believe the U.S.-German relationship is "bad." Another recent poll found that only 14 percent of Germans believe the United States is a reliable partner. Many Germans feel this way because Washington has developed an exasperating habit of making unilateral diplomatic decisions that have a disproportionately negative impact on European businesses.

Many Europeans, furthermore, believe the post-World War II, U.S.-led order is in rapid decline. Pluralities of those Pew surveyed last year in France, Germany and Britain said that China—not America—is the world's leading economic power.

Not popular in Europe, but why?

The American president seems to confirm many of the negative stereotypes Europeans hold about Americans. "Temperamentally," writes global affairs

In one sense,
President Trump is
proving to be a unifier
of an increasingly
anti-American Europe.

columnist Walter Russell Mead, “Mr. Trump’s impulsive nature puts him at odds with the low-key norms of statesmanship upon which the European Union depends. Stylistically, his theatrical approach to politics strikes Europeans as both dangerous and unserious. ... Even worse from a European perspective, Mr. Trump believes international relations are driven by need and self-interest—and by Mr. Trump’s measure, Europe needs the U.S. much more than the U.S. needs Europe.”

“He doesn’t believe,” continues Mead, “military power will become less relevant as progress marches on,” and he believes individual nation states will remain the dominant geopolitical force. Mr. Trump concludes, according to Mead, that “the EU’s political establishment is just as blind and misguided as they believe he is” (*Wall Street Journal*).

As a businessman and self-proclaimed dealmaker who sees international relations from a transactional perspective demanding reciprocity, President Trump despises Berlin’s trade imbalance with Washington.

“When Mr. Trump looks at Germany today,” adds Mead, “he may not see much of an ally. Germany benefits immensely, the president believes, from America’s investments in NATO and more generally in Europe. But it responds with selfish trade policies, moral lectures, and security free-riding.”

Outsourcing Europe’s defense

Like many Western nations, Germany has grown accustomed in the nearly three decades after the Cold War to slashing defense budgets, enjoying its “peace dividend” and outsourcing its defense under the U.S. security umbrella.

As the biggest economy in Europe and fourth largest in the world, Germany has an astounding current account surplus amounting to 8 percent of its gross domestic product, but puts only 1.24 percent of that GDP toward its own defense—far below NATO’s agreed-upon minimum contribution of 2 percent. The German electorate, which associates military strength with the country’s darkest chapters, currently balks at increasing military expenditures. Neighboring countries, though, these days seem to be concerned less by German strength than weakness.

Germany has cut its armed forces from around 500,000 soldiers in 1990 to around 180,000 in 2017. Meanwhile, equipment rusts and grows outdated. Entire areas of the military are “hollow,” short on everything from tents to winter clothes.

Recent military assessments noted that because of needed repairs, less than half of German tanks are battle-ready and that none of their six submarines are seaworthy. The German air force lends little to NATO, as only four of the Luftwaffe’s 128 Eurofighter jets are armed and ready.

During a recent assessment, a paltry 8 percent of German soldiers trusted their weapons, and in 2015, due to poor funding, soldiers were forced to use broomsticks as guns during training exercises.

Unintentional unifier

Repercussions of a transatlantic rift are massive. The imbalance of the trade and military partnership highlighted by the American president threatens to turn the rift into a rupture. In one sense, President Trump is proving to be a unifier of an increasingly anti-American Europe that is feeling more confident in its ability to reject any partnership with the U.S.

As the EU intensifies its economic relationship with Russia through massive energy deals and pivots toward Asia, the gap will widen.

The object of NATO, said General Lord Ismay, its first secretary general, was “to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.” President Trump’s threat to walk away from the alliance if there is not more burden sharing potentially changes the formula. But requiring Germany to step up may, down the road, lead to a far different result than anticipated.

For now, the EU, not military conquest, is Germany’s tool for European influence. But the “mutable Germans,” as historian Luigi Barzini noted in *The Europeans*, have shown many times the ability to “change into something entirely different within a short time.”

As economic tensions rise, consider that end-time Bible prophecy foretells a revival, led by Germany, of a 10-nation “beast” power to rise again from the ashes of the Roman Empire (Revelation 17:9-14) as an awesome and unmatched military, economic and religious power (Daniel 11:40-45; Revelation 13:1-8; 18:2-3, 9-14). Watch for it. **D**

Learn more about the future for Europe and the world in our free booklet *The Book of Revelation: The Storm Before the Calm*.





WHEN ARE YOU ACTUALLY SAVED?

Millions of people around the world believe they are “saved” the moment they accept Christ. But are they? Is there more to salvation than what many people believe?

By Erik Jones

In our last issue, we explored the biblical concept of [salvation](#). We discovered:

- We are saved from *death* (not an eternity of suffering in hell, as many believe).
- We are saved by the resurrected life of Jesus Christ.
- There are essential steps (beyond mere profession of Jesus’ name) that we must take.

But there is still another major question we have to answer: *When* are we actually saved?

Mainstream Christianity almost exclusively speaks of salvation as a present reality in the life of a Christian. It is viewed as the state of believers at the moment they accept Jesus Christ as Savior (or, for some denominations, at the moment of baptism). In other words, if you have accepted Jesus, you *are* saved. Your sins are forgiven, and your place in heaven is assured. End of story.

But is that all there is to salvation?

In His famous Olivet Prophecy, Jesus said: “But he who endures to the end *shall* be saved” (Matthew 24:13, emphasis added throughout). “The end” refers to the end of this age and Christ’s second coming.

So, Jesus seems to be saying that salvation will occur in the future. That statement seems to indicate that being saved is a future event that believers have not yet experienced.

But there are other passages that seem to say the opposite. For instance, Paul said, “For by grace you *have been* saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). This seems to imply salvation is a past event.

But in still other places, the Bible speaks of salvation as something that’s ongoing: “But to us who *are being* saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

So which is it? “Shall be saved” (future), “have been saved” (past) or “are being saved” (present)?

The answer is—*yes, all three!*

Salvation is a process

How can all three be true?

To understand this, we have to remember exactly what salvation is—it is being *saved* from sin and its consequences. Sin (which results in separation from God and ultimately death) is the major obstacle to our achieving God’s purpose for us, which is to become perfect as He is perfect (Matthew 5:48). When a person accepts Christ and is baptized, he or she is only beginning on that path. Salvation is best understood as a *process*—not an event.

The past, present and future aspects of being saved represent three major steps of the salvation process. Let’s take a closer look at each step.

Step 1: Becoming a Christian (“have been saved”)

The first step is being called by God and coming to Him through Jesus Christ. In order to do that, the primary problem we have to deal with is *ourselves*. All of us come to God with a lifetime of sins on our record. We need to be saved from having to experience eternal death as a consequence for those sins (Romans 6:23).

When we accept Christ and His shed blood for sin, we must deeply repent of those sins and be baptized (Acts 2:38). When a person rises up out of the watery grave of baptism, those sins are “washed away” and “blotted out”—completely cleansed and expunged from the person’s record (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 22:16).

This is what Paul was referring to when he wrote that “by grace you *have been saved* through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). Immediately after baptism, every truly repentant believer has been *saved* from all the sins committed before that moment. God accepts Jesus’ death to pay the penalty for those sins on our behalf—we are saved from that penalty.

So, this is the sense in which a true believer is *already* saved.

Step 2: Living the Christian life (“being saved”)

When true believers come out of the waters of baptism, they are saved from the sins they committed prior to that moment—but there’s still a problem. They will continue to live. Which means they will *sin again*.

True belief, repentance and baptism wash away past sins, but do not blot out all future sins. In order to be saved from sins committed after baptism, a believer must repent of and seek God’s forgiveness for those sins. Writing primarily to baptized Christians, John wrote, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

When those post-baptism sins are repented of and cleansed from our record, we are *saved* from those sins. This is the sense in which we *are being* saved through an



“The process of being saved has only begun in our lives today—but Christ will complete it at His return.”

ongoing process. As we repent of sins after baptism and continue to grow in God’s character, we are saved from the death penalty for those sins by Christ’s sacrifice and are continually reconciled to God.

Step 3: Receiving eternal life at Christ’s return (“shall be saved”)

But there is still another aspect of salvation that is yet future. Remember that the two results of sin we need to be saved from are death and alienation from God. We are not fully saved, in its ultimate sense, until we are composed of spirit and made perfect—no longer in danger of sin or death. This is what Jesus Christ was referring to when He said, “He who endures to the end *shall be saved*” (Matthew 24:13).

When Jesus returns, He will bring salvation to His people: “He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Hebrews 9:28). The process of being saved has only *begun* in our lives today—but Christ will *complete it* at His return. Salvation is ultimately given at the *end* of a physical lifetime of faithfully repenting, growing and developing a life of faith toward God (1 Peter 1:9). This is why the Bible says we are “saved by His life” (Romans 5:10)—because only a *living*, resurrected Savior can return and give eternal life!

This is “the hope of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:8). It is the future hope that true Christians seek. It is being saved from death and becoming a member of God’s family for all eternity. **D**

To learn how to start the process of salvation in your life, download our free booklet *Change Your Life*.



The Low, Clear Reveille of God

Visiting the memorial on Corregidor brought home lessons from the past and promises for the future.

■ SQUINTING THROUGH THE SEA SPRAY LASHING my face, I watched over the heaving bow of our motorized outrigger as our destination loomed.

Dividing the waters at the mouth of Manila Bay is a pollywog-shaped island, sometimes called “The Rock,” fortified since the 16th century to protect the Philippine capital from seaborne attack. Today Corregidor is remembered most for the final, heroic but doomed resistance of American and Philippine troops swept away by the Japanese military tsunami of 1942.

Our little craft had launched from the Bataan Peninsula, very near the starting point of the infamous “death march” that followed the final surrender.

Reminders of courage and suffering

The island is full of reminders of courage and suffering: wrecked fortifications, unseated artillery, collapsed tunnels and many monuments—American, Philippine and Japanese.

We docked within view of the statue honoring Douglas MacArthur, who initially masterminded the defense of the Philippines. When he arrived in Australia after escaping with his staff as ordered, he famously promised, “I shall return.” Two and a half years later, he kept his word, waded ashore and oversaw the liberation of the nation.

Focus on a future return

As this issue of *Discern* appears, we are in the season when the Bible, through its divinely commanded festivals, encourages us to focus on future events that will include another, vastly more important return, that of Jesus Christ.

He promised several times that He would return to earth from heaven to establish the Kingdom of God: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself” (John 14:3; see also Luke 21:27-31; Acts 1:11; Revelation 5:10).

Remarkable promise

The riveting Pacific War Memorial on Corregidor’s highest peak poetically describes one of the most remarkable promises of God, which will begin its fulfillment at Christ’s

return. My eyes welled when I read the inscription on the white marble memorial:

*Sleep, my sons, your duty done... for freedom’s light has come,
Sleep in the silent depths of the sea, or in your bed of hallowed sod,
Until you hear at dawn the low, clear reveille of God.*

The Bible teaches that the dead are asleep, awaiting their resurrection. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Those in Christ shall rise first, but all will eventually rise to life. Jesus promised, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth” (John 5:28-29). Every human being.

While we sorrow now over the suffering and the separation caused by death, this magnificent promise to all of us is one that should help us live in confidence and courage: *the low, clear reveille of God.*

That day will dawn!

—Joel Meeker
@JoelMeeker



From vivid images of destruction to sublime visions of beauty, the book of Revelation explains what will happen before and after Jesus Christ's return to earth.



What does it mean
for your life—now
and in the future?

Download the free booklet from the
Learning Center on LifeHopeandTruth.com