



Can God be Trusted?
A mother's journey of faith.

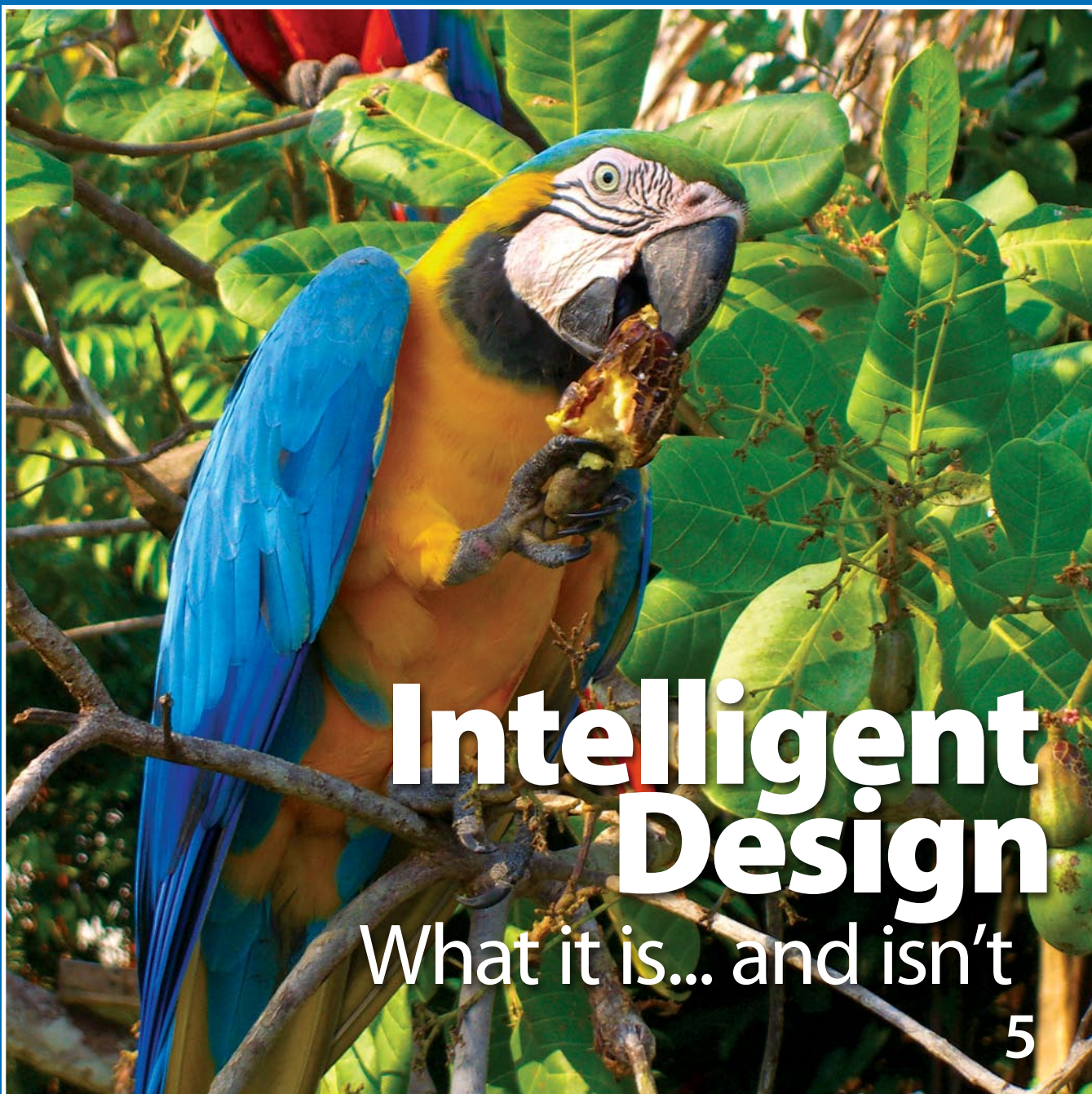


Summer is coming
How about a week to change your life?

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

April/May 2006

Exploring Life and Faith



Intelligent Design

What it is... and isn't

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Letters to the Editor

Warm greetings from the Philippines! I just read the February issue of Christian Odyssey. As I read your editorial, what stood out in my mind is the statement by Mike Feazell:

"This magazine is about grace, pure and simple. People need to know that God loves them and will make their lives worthwhile despite everything they've heard to the contrary. Christian Odyssey is not about religion; it's about good news."

I truly appreciate this statement, and I say AMEN! & AMEN!

GRE Philippines

Thank you for Odyssey and I am looking forward to articles by Paul Kroll should he be a regular contributor. I have grown to look forward to his writings. They are usually very interesting and easy to understand. Writing in layman's terms is very valuable. Especially as we grow older.

LF Arkansas

Paul is getting older too, but we hope he is good for many more articles yet.

I see a lot of potential with this tool. Media is part of our (the WCG) 'DNA' and I think we should use it where possible. Not meaning to be critical, just offering an impression - the trim size is not standard. Sometimes that can create a negative impression on what's inside. You may have to increase paper opacity and brightness. Anyway, for what its worth. You have a budget, and money talks as they say. Keep up the good work. This old publishing guy is cheering you on.

RM Alabama

We agree. After reviewing the February and March issues, we decided to increase the size of the magazine, add some pages and use a better quality of paper. We hope you like the result. Of course, this comes at a price, and our budget is not unlimited. So we have decided to publish six times a year, alternating with the WCG's other publication, Together.

Just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed reading CO from bow to stern. The color makes so much difference in the appeal of the publication. I tried to look at it from the viewpoint of one who has never picked up a previous issue of CO to read it. We all need "eye candy" from time to time to get us interested in what's on the inside and the cover of this issue does it for me. Also, the articles are short, well written, and have a lot of human interest. I especially liked the creativity Joyce Catherwood used in writing "The Bride's Story," and I appreciate Jump Start for the encouragement it offers to "could be" writers. I thank you in advance for the future articles that will be written by these people. Looking forward to the next issue!

Judi (email)

I was just reading the magazine this morning and my interest was caught by the Jump Start page. The article speaks about a 450-500 word article, but I was wondering, are you considering including any poetry at any time? I know this is a Christian magazine, but, is the (450-500 word) article to be strictly religious in nature, and is there a particular doctrine to be considered, or are there other parameters to be included as well?

RS (email)

The articles submitted must be in keeping with the general theme of the magazine, which is focused on the Christian life. All articles must be compatible with the accepted beliefs of Christian orthodoxy. They should be between 500-650 words. And please understand, we will rarely consider poetry. Amateur poetry is an intimate expression of creativity, and is therefore almost impossible to edit.

I just want to thank Joyce Catherwood for the wonderful article, The Syro-Phoenician Mother. It shows the depth of compassion and love our Lord had for all mankind. It also shows the love and compassion we should have when dealing with unbelievers.

JB Northern Ireland

I have just finished reading Sheila Graham's very interesting update of the Hittites, but I was distracted by her use of BCE. I guess you approve of it or you would have edited the article.

Will you be using BCE in future articles instead of the historical BC? I just don't believe the secular usage is proper in Christian literature or articles. Am I a hard-core traditionalist?

GB (email)

BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era) are relatively new abbreviations (early last century) that are slowly replacing the traditional BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, or Year of the Lord). The word "common" simply refers to the fact that the Gregorian Calendar is the most frequently used calendar system. The idea behind BCE-CE is to use in scholarly writing abbreviations that are not so obviously rooted in any particular religious system.

At the moment we don't intend to make an issue of which to use; we leave it to the writer. Some people interpret BCE to mean "Before Christian Era" and CE to mean "Christian Era," so they can have it both ways.

It is useful to remember that no one knows exactly when Jesus was born (it was most likely between 7 BC and 4 BC). This means that the BC-AD system, which was not even invented until 525 AD, does not accurately reflect the birth of Jesus, anyway. The BC-AD system is actually based on the last year of the reign of the Jewish King Herod. So does it really matter whether we use BC-AD or BCE-CE?

Letters for this section should be addressed to "Letters to the Editor." Send your letters to Worldwide Church of God PO Box 5005 Glendora, CA 91740-5005, or by electronic mail to john.halford@wgc.org.

The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space. We welcome your comments.

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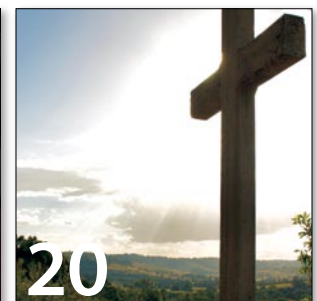
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Tired of Life, With Everything to Live For

By John Halford

As a member of our local Ministerial Association, I take my turn with a Bible Study at one of the local retirement homes. Folks in these parts tend to live a very long time, and some of the residents are well into their eighties and nineties. And their minds are still sharp.

On one evening last February, a lady who will be 100 next year, asked me, “Why has God let me live this long? What’s the point?”

How do you answer that?

I told her I would need to think about it. A week later I was still thinking.

When we met together again I said, “I don’t have an answer to your question. But let me show you some things in the Bible that I bet you didn’t know were there.”

I asked the group to turn to the Book of Ecclesiastes. It took a few moments to find it. Many of us, even if we have been Christians all our lives, don’t really know our way around the Old Testament.

Unlike the Proverbs, which are aimed at young people, Ecclesiastes seems to be directed at old folks. The author—it was probably King Solomon—looks back on a long and eventful life. He had “been there, done that” and got just about every tee shirt. He contemplates not only his considerable achievements, but also the futility of it all. It makes for a surprising book. I like it in Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* version, which makes the frank, almost cynical observations even more down to earth.

It begins, “*Smoke, nothing but smoke...There’s nothing to anything—it’s all smoke.*” (1:1-2) and continues “*What’s there to show for a lifetime of work, a lifetime of working your fingers to the bone? One generation goes its way, the next one arrives, but nothing changes—it’s business as usual for old planet earth*” (verses 3 and 4).

It continues in this vein through 12 chapters of what seems like glum world-weariness.

“*Everything’s boring, utterly boring—no one can find any meaning in it...Boring to the eye, boring to the ear. What was will be again, what happened will happen again*”(1:8-9).

“*I tried my level best to penetrate the absurdity of life. I wanted to get a handle on anything useful we mortals might do during the years we spend on this earth*” (2:3).

“*But when I looked, I saw nothing but smoke. Smoke and spitting into the wind. There was nothing to any of it. Nothing*” (2:11).

“*Search as hard as you like, you’re not going to make sense of it. No matter how smart you are, you won’t get to the bottom of It* (8:17).

As we read these words, everyone murmured in agreement. “Yep—that is how it is.” “He got that right.” “Yes sir. I feel like that too sometimes.”

“But, what are things like that doing in the Bible?” someone asked. “I always read the Bible for encouragement. This seems so pessimistic.”

“But it *is* how you feel sometimes, isn’t it?” I asked. They agreed. Whoever wrote this book certainly understood what it was like to get old. These physical frames, in which we spend the first few decades of life, are not meant to last forever:

“*In old age, your body no longer serves you so well, Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints stiffen...The shades are pulled down on the world. You can’t come and go at will. Things grind to a halt...you’re well on your way to eternal rest, while your friends make plans for your funeral*” (12:3-5).

They laughed at that. It was *so* true.

“Well,” I said. “That’s the best I can do. I haven’t answered the question, but this book shows that it is not wrong for you to ask it. Although the Ancient of Days never experiences senility or the other effects of old age, he has anticipated the kind of things we worry about in the later years. Ecclesiastes is a reminder that you are 100 percent alive until you are 100 percent dead. So, “*Even if you live a long time, don’t take a single day for granted. Take delight in each light-filled hour, remembering that there will also be many dark days and that most of what comes your way is smoke*” (11:8).

Eventually it will all become clear. This life, even if it seems to drag on and on, is only the opening notes of a symphony God intends to share with us for eternity. “*The last and final word is this: Fear God. Do what he tells you. And that’s it. Eventually God will bring everything that we do out into the open and judge it according to its hidden intent, whether it’s good or evil*” (12:13).

It seems that the weary old cynic who wrote Ecclesiastes ended up trusting in God’s grace. ●



Intelligent Design: What it is... and isn't

By Jay W. Richards

Unless you've been hiding in a cave, you've heard of "intelligent design" (ID) and some of its leading proponents—Stephen Meyer, Michael Behe, William Dembski. Unfortunately, you probably got the media's inaccurate spin. It's so predictable, I sometimes wonder if reporters aren't using computer macros.

The predictably witty headline: "Creationism Evolves." The cartoon-like caricature of the United State's 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial over evolution in the classroom. Conspiracy theories about religious fanatics scheming to smuggle Bibles into the science class as the first step toward establishing a theocracy. Next comes a quotation supposedly representing the view of all "serious scientists," with the phrase "overwhelming evidence" thrown in for good measure. The story practically writes itself, and it possesses this virtue: it saves the reporter the bother of actually investigating what design theory really is.

Victor Victorian

So what is ID, really? ID is not a deduction from religious dogma or scripture. It's simply the argument that certain features of the natural world—from miniature machines and digital information found in living cells, to the fine-tuning of physical constants—are best explained as the result of an intelligent cause. ID is thus a tacit rebuke of an idea inherited from the 19th century, called scientific materialism.

Natural science in the Victorian Age, or rather, its materialistic gloss, offered a radically different view of the universe: (1) The universe has always existed, so we need not explain its origin; (2) Everything in the universe submits to deterministic laws. (3) Life is the love child of luck and chemistry. (4) Cells, the basic units of life, are essentially blobs of Jell-O.

Onto this dubious edifice Charles Darwin added

a fifth conjecture: All the sophisticated organisms around us grew from a process called natural selection: this process seizes and passes along those minor, random variations in a population that provide a survival advantage. With this, Darwin explained away the apparent design in the biological world as just that—only apparent.

Each of these 19th-century assumptions has been undermined or discredited in the 20th century, but the materialist gloss remains: There is one god, matter, and science is its prophet. It hides behind its more modest cousin, methodological naturalism. According to this tidy dictum, scientists can believe whatever they want in their personal lives, but they must appeal only to impersonal causes when explaining nature. Accordingly, any who discuss purpose or design within science (the founders of modern science generously excepted) cease to be scientists.

“ID is not a deduction from religious doctrine. It simply argues that certain features of the natural world are best explained as the result of an intelligent cause.”



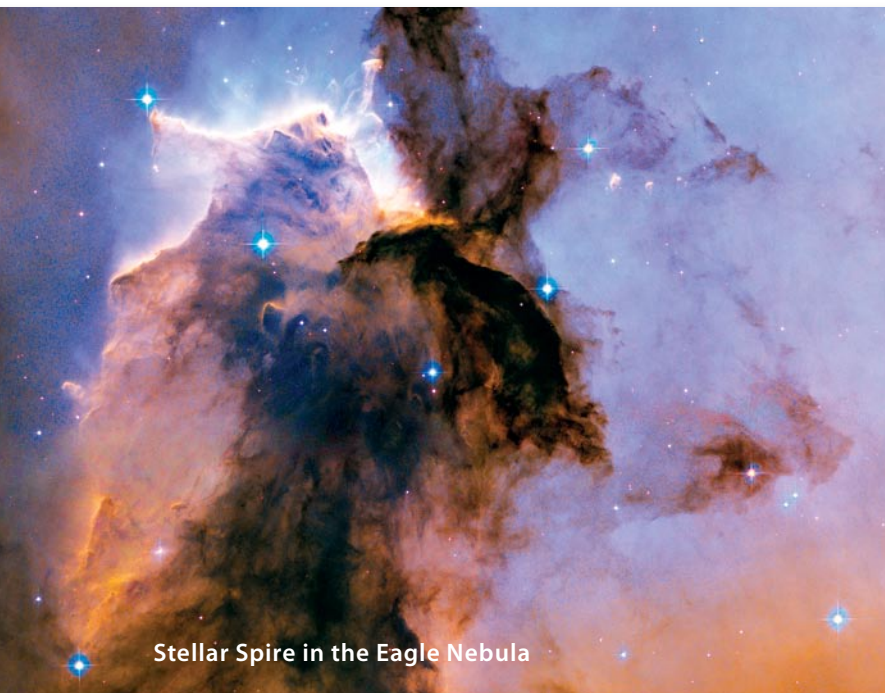
Monarch Butterfly

The Universe Strikes Back

There was one problem with this tidy rule. Nature forgot to cooperate. The trouble started in the 1920s when astronomer Edwin Hubble discovered that the light from distant galaxies was "red-shifted." It had stretched during the course of its travels. This sug-

gested the universe is expanding. Reversing the process in their minds, scientists were suddenly confronted with a universe that had come into existence in the finite past. Who knew! Hubble's discovery, confirmed by later evidence, flatly contradicted the earlier picture of an eternal and self-existing cosmos. The universe itself had re-introduced the question of its origin to a community bent on avoiding the question altogether.

This was just the beginning. In the 1960s and '70s, physicists found that the universal constants of physics (e.g., gravity, electromagnetism) appeared finely tuned for complex life. To astrophysicist and atheist Fred Hoyle, this fine-tuning suggested the work of a "superintellect."



Stellar Spire in the Eagle Nebula

Still more recently, growing evidence in astronomy has revealed that even in a finely tuned universe, dozens of local conditions have to be just right to build a single habitable planet. This growing list of unlikely requirements is only half the story. In *The Privileged Planet*, astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez and I argue that those conditions for habitability also provide the best overall conditions for doing science. The very places where observers can exist are the same places that provide the best overall conditions for observing. For instance, the most life-friendly region of the galaxy is also the best place to be an astronomer and cosmologist. You might expect this if the universe were designed for discovery, but not if, as astronomer Carl Sagan put it, "The universe is all there is, ever was, or ever will be."

Information Plantation

Of course, even with a suitable environment, you don't automatically get man or even amoebas. Before the

Darwinian mechanism can even get started, it needs a wealth of biological information as part of the first self-reproducing organism. For instance, there's the information encoded along the DNA molecule, often described as a sophisticated computer code for producing proteins, the three-dimensional building blocks of all life. These, in turn, need the right cellular hardware to function.

In recent years, philosophers William Dembski and Stephen Meyer have turned this evidence into a formidable argument for intelligent design. Dembski, also a mathematician, applies information and probability theory to the subject. Meyer argues that the usual aimless processes of chance and chemistry simply can't explain biological information and that, moreover, our everyday experience shows us where such information comes from—intelligent agents.

Moving up a level, we find complex and functionally integrated machines that are out of reach to the Darwinian mechanism. Biochemist Michael Behe immortalized some of these in his bestselling 1996 book, *Darwin's Black Box*.

Behe argues that molecular machines like the bacterial flagellum are "irreducibly complex." They're like a mousetrap. Without all of their basic parts, they don't work. Natural selection can only build systems one small step at a time, where each step provides an immediate survival advantage for the organism. It can't select for a future function. To do that requires foresight—the exclusive jurisdiction of intelligent agents. That's the positive evidence for design: Such structures are the sort produced by intelligent agents, who can foresee a future function. If you get this point, you've already comprehended

more than most journalists writing on the subject.

The New Zoo Review

Moving to the macroscopic world, we see the three-dimensional complexity of many diverse animal body plans (phyla). In the fossil record, these show up suddenly. The problem for Darwinism is not that there are "gaps." Of course there are. Rather, it's the entire fossil record's pattern of sudden appearance of new phyla and persistent morphological isolation between them. This is not the gradually branching tree of life the Darwinian story leads us to expect.

Nor is this an argument from ignorance. In our experience, sudden innovations and massive infusions of information come from intelligent agents. The primary innovations come first (e.g., car, airplane, a new Cambrian phylum) followed by variations on the original form. This is the story the fossil record tells.

'Dawkins' God', reviewed by John Halford

The Definition or the Evidence?

At the beginning of the 21st century, we have new evidence and new intellectual tools at our disposal. Standing in the way is the materialistic definition of science inherited from the Victorian Age. If a definition of science conflicts with the scientific evidence, should we go with the definition or the evidence?

To ask the question is to answer it. “Scientia” means knowledge. If we are properly scientific, then we should be open to the natural world, not decide beforehand what it’s allowed to reveal. Either the universe provides evidence for purpose and design or it doesn’t. The way to resolve the question isn’t to play definitional games but to look.

The G-word

Recently, Nobel-prize winning physicist Charles Townes asked, “What is the purpose or meaning of life? Or of our universe? These are questions which should concern us all.... If the universe has a purpose, then its structure, and how it works, must reflect this purpose.”

Townes continues: “Serious intellectual discussion of the possible meaning of our universe, or the nature of religion and philosophical views of religion and science, needs to be openly and carefully discussed.”

Unfortunately, few are willing to follow Townes’ advice. If we talk about ID, we’re warned, someone, somewhere, will start talking about God.

But certain ideas in science will always have theological implications. As arch-Darwinist Richard Dawkins so memorably said, “Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.” Right.

Both Dawkins and Townes agree that ideas in science can have theological implications. Isn’t that obvious? Yet in our current climate, even the bare rumor of God causes some to reach for their stash of derisive terms—“theocrat,” “fundamentalist,” “creationist”—they don’t require much imagination.

But that response rings increasingly hollow. The genie is out of the bottle, and name-calling and misinformation won’t put him back. The mandarins can no longer control the flow of information to those who seek it. The implications can take care of themselves. It’s time to discuss the evidence. ●

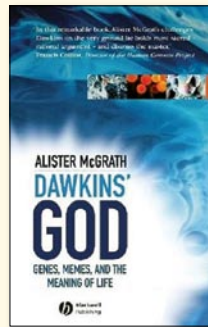


Jay Wesley Richards, Ph.D., is a Research Fellow with the Acton Institute and a Senior Fellow of the Center for Science & Culture at the Discovery Institute.

He is the co-author, with astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez, of *The Privileged Planet: How Our Place in the Cosmos is Designed for Discovery* (Regnery, 2004), and contributes to the blog idthefuture.com.

One thing I have learned is that you cannot prove God exists to someone who is determined to believe he does not. No matter what proofs you offer, a committed atheist will remain unconvinced. He might even use your evidence against you and put a dent in your own faith.

We believers are often made to feel that we are arguing from a position of weakness. Unless you can prove that God exists, the only logical conclusion a rational person can arrive at is that God doesn’t. Perhaps the most skillful exponent of this is Oxford Professor Richard Dawkins – a world-renowned opponent of faith and religion.



McGrath shows that to deny the existence and influence of a higher creative power, takes considerable faith.

So brilliant is Dr. Dawkins’ reasoning, so eloquent his arguments, that even highly educated scholars refuse to debate him. Not so Alister McGrath. Once an atheist himself, McGrath is now one of Britain’s leading Christian scholars. In *Dawkins’ God: Genes, Memes and the Meaning of Life*, he tackles the logic for atheism head on, and in fact, turns many of the arguments on their head. McGrath has a Ph.D in molecular biology, is not intimidated with the jargon and can easily deal with complex scientific ideas. The book is not “light reading”, but it is not difficult for the nonprofessional to grasp.

McGrath exposes atheism for what it is. He shows that to deny the existence and influence of a higher creative power, in the face of the evidence that science continues to discover, takes considerable faith. The natural sciences and theology both explore reality in their own ways. But no matter which direction you approach, McGrath argues convincingly that atheism, far from being a logical default position, is actually the least likely explanation.

Look for a discussion on this subject with Alister McGrath in the next issue of *Christian Odyssey*. In the meantime, I think you will enjoy *Dawkins’ God*.

Dawkins’ God: Gene, Memes and the Meaning of Life, Alister McGrath, Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Bible Prophecy: What's it All About?

By Mike Feazell

Nothing sells like prophecy. It's true. A church or ministry can have goofy theology, an oddball leader and ridiculously strict rules and regulations, but if they have a few world maps, a pair of scissors and a stack of newspapers, along with an even half articulate preacher, it seems, people will send them money by the bucket-loads.

People are scared of what they don't know, and they don't know the future. So it seems that any old huckster who comes along claiming to know what's around the corner, if he's clever enough to forge God's signature to his predictions by juggling scriptures like a circus magician, can round up quite a hefty following.

But one thing we ought to get straight if we don't want to be sucker punched by prophecy pushers is this: Bible prophecy is not about our knowing the future; it's about our knowing Jesus Christ.

If you want a good case of prediction addiction, go hand your brain over to the self-proclaimed messengers of God so they can fill it with fiction about which

vealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (1 Peter 1:10-12).

- Here's the scoop, then, straight from Peter to us:
1. The Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, is the source of prophecy (Revelation 19:10 says the same thing).
 2. The purpose of prophecy was to predict the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 3. When you've heard the gospel, you've heard all there is to know about prophecy.

And what did Peter expect his readers (us) to do with this information? Just this: "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed" (verse 13). To set our minds on that grace is to live out the "new birth" (verse 3), in faith (verse 7), as we "love one another deeply, from the heart" (verse 22).

Wait a minute, you say. What about Revelation?

Revelation predicts the future, doesn't it?

No. Not the way prophecy addicts think it does. Revelation's picture of the future is simply that some day, Jesus will come, and everyone who receives him with joy will share in his kingdom and everyone who opposes him will be

left with nothing. Revelation is a call to never give up in the service of your Lord, even if it kills you, because you're safe in his loving hands—regardless of what the seemingly never-ending parade of evil systems, governments and people might do to you.

Bible prophecy, including the book of Revelation, is about Jesus Christ—who he is, what he's done, and the simple fact that he will return. In the light of that truth—the gospel truth—prophecy entails a call to "live holy and godly lives as we look forward to the day of God" (2 Peter 3:12).

Bogus misrepresentations of Bible prophecy only divert attention from its true message—from the "simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3), from the gospel.

Prediction addiction sells, but the cure is simple and free—a good dose of the unvarnished gospel. ●



“Bible prophecy is not about our knowing the future; it's about our knowing Jesus Christ.”

particular despot is actually the “king of the south” or the “king of the north” or the “beast” or the “false prophet” or the tenth “horn.” It'll be loads of fun, very exciting, and almost as spiritually useful as playing dungeons and dragons for the rest of your life.

Or you could take a lesson from the apostle Peter. He had a few thoughts about prophecy—its origin, its value, and its purpose. He knew what it was all about. And he passed that info along to us in what we call the first epistle of Peter.

“Concerning this salvation [described in the previous seven verses], the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was re-

A Sorry State of Affairs

Understanding the power of an apology

by Curtis May and Neil Earle

“Why should I apologize to the descendants of slaves, or the holocaust, or the Northern Irish? I didn’t do it. It happened before I was born. How can apologizing for things you didn’t do help anything? Is it biblical? Can you back it up? Aren’t you just stirring up trouble?”

At Worldwide Church of God’s Office of Reconciliation Ministries (ORM) we get such questions often. They are logical questions. They deserve an answer.

Consider this. The police chief of a major American city, a leader in community reconciliation, recently confessed to one of us a lapse in judgment. He had sat down at a restaurant where the waiter serving him was Turkish. Suddenly, deeply buried resentments inside the chief’s psyche rose to the surface. He proceeded to make life miserable for the young waiter.

Why?

The chief was of Armenian descent. Inside him were deep feelings he had heard around the family table concerning the Armenian genocide, one of the 20th century’s most heinous crimes. “The Turks have never apologized for that episode,” the chief told one of us. “Still, that was no excuse for my behavior toward that young man.”

Events 100 years old came hurtling out of the past as if they were wounds from yesterday.

“Land of the Living Past”

Remember “ethnic cleansing”?

In the 1990s, millions of people in the Balkans found themselves caught up in hatreds and resentments that went back to squabbles and atrocities of the 1300s. One journalist called this area “the land of the living past.”

In writer William Faulkner’s words, “The past isn’t dead. It isn’t even past.”

Ancient hatreds and animosities still exist. The trouble is already out there walking around. The dead hand of the past is not so dead. People still living carry around bitter folk memories of wrongs inflicted on their ancestors, wounds that have been passed on down. A phrase from Exodus 20:5 comes to mind: “the sins of the

fathers to the third and fourth generation.”

Hatreds take on a life of their own—the Capulets and the Montagues in “Romeo and Juliet;” the Hatfields and the McCoys in early America. In Bosnia the hurt went marching down the generations.

In the face of deeply rooted hatreds, can a simple apology be of much help?

“Attitudes have a kind of inertia,” wrote M. Scott Peck. “Once set in motion they will keep going, even in the face of the evidence. To change an attitude requires a considerable amount of work and suffering.”

“Work and suffering.” That’s the hard part. So where to begin? Who is responsible for trying to break such cycles of hatred? The dead? Obviously not. Who, then, will step into the breach, and how?

Sins of the Fathers?

Many counselors believe that an indispensable first step in shutting down any cycle of hatred is to work toward an apology. “What—a simple apology?” Wait. No apology is simple. That’s why it has to be “worked towards.” It’s a process. It requires emotional and spiritual

“Can a living generation be held accountable for what their ancestors did?”



commitment on the part of the one offering it—and for the injured party to accept it. Which is to say that neither mercy nor forgiveness are easy. On anyone’s part.

Jesus alluded to this in Matthew 5:23-24, “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

Continues on page 11

Can God be Trusted?

By Ann Hartmann

My beloved son, Jeremy, was in denial about his substance abuse problems, and I was consumed with fixing him.

I tried tough love, tender mercy, and everything in between, but he was a grown man and I had no control over his choices. Helplessly watching his struggle was a faith-growing season for me. I had to give up my illusion of being able to protect him. I had to let go and entrust him to God's care.

During my struggle with Jeremy's situation, I listened as other people testified about God delivering them from circumstances far worse than Jeremy's. I was

“I don't think Jeremy realized what a positive difference he made – but it was obvious at his funeral.”

sure God was going to give my precious son his own victory story to tell. That was *my* plan for Jeremy's life, and I expected God to make it happen.

Jeremy was a hardworking, skilled electrician. By Thursday night, he had already put in a 41 hour work week. He decided to treat himself to dinner out. He said, “Mama, I'll be home around 9:00 or 9:30,” and walked out the door.

He had been living with me the last week because he had lost his apartment. I had been reluctant to let him move back in—maybe my help wouldn't help—but I will forever treasure those seven days. They were a gift to me from God.

Only God knows the exact details, but at 3:30 a.m. on October 15, 2004, Jeremy's Honda Accord was found wrapped around a telephone pole. Inside, he was dead at the tender age of 24. The test results on the police report registered his blood alcohol level at 0.18. *Jeremy was the drunk driver who killed my son.*

Attack on my faith

Grief over my son's death began to slice through me like thousands of horrible barbed needles. It was more than pain; it was an attack on my faith, threatening to

kill it too. Terrifying lies filled my ears and I struggled to combat them.

• Lie: “*God didn't answer your prayers.*”

I don't understand why God didn't intervene as I had expected, but he didn't—or at least that is how it appears. I'm disappointed, maybe even angry with God for not stopping my son's death. But somehow, down inside me somewhere, I still believe that God knows better than I do, and that he knew what *best* really was. I know I am an ant in comparison to God (Job 38-42). But I so wanted to *see* God work the miracle in Jeremy's life. Maybe some miracles are too great for human eyes (1 Corinthians 2:9).

• Lie: “*God doesn't love you!*”

I can't imagine loving anyone enough to sacrifice my son's life for them, but that is how much God says he loves me (John 3:16). A mother's love can be amazingly strong; I know that for sure; but God's love is even stronger, and it's unconditional. Knowing that didn't ease the pain I was feeling when Jeremy died, but I did sense that God hadn't left me completely alone, even though I was too numb to think about it.

• Lie: “*Jeremy's life was wasted.*”

Jeremy's friends shared stories about how he had been there for them. I don't think Jeremy realized what a positive difference he made—but it was obvious at his funeral. God's good plans for Jeremy have not been hindered by his physical death. God is not limited by the time and space we are confined in. He can take a tragedy and use it for good (Romans 8:28).

• Lie: “*You lost your son.*”

As much as I claimed him, Jeremy didn't belong to me. He belongs to God.

graciously shared him with me, and I am thankful. I learned so much from having Jeremy in my life, and the joy of having known him is far greater than the pain of losing him. Besides, he's not *lost*. God knows exactly where he is.

• Lie: “*If you were really God's child, He wouldn't let you suffer.*”

God never promised us an easy life, just that he would never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). His own Son Jesus suffered for us and hung on a wooden cross for us. Jesus feels our pain and cries with us (John 11:35). Even in our darkest hour, he is with us, sharing our anguish.

• Lie: "You can't get through this."

Losing a child is the greatest loss I have ever known. Without a doubt, I could never get through this on my own strength – but I haven't had to. God continually amazes me. He shines all the light I need for each step. He uses ordinary people and little things to strengthen and comfort me. God is faithful to see us through any challenge we face (1 Corinthians 10:13) and his grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9).

• Lie: "God failed you this time!"

I used to beg God to give me more faith. I thought it was a feeling, but when Jeremy died, I didn't feel any faith at all. Then I sensed God speaking to my heart, "I've already given you *my* faith—just use it." During the dark times, when I *feel* like doubting, I must *choose* to believe. Jeremy's death doesn't make sense to me, but I believe it makes sense to God. God sees what I cannot, and faith believes what cannot be seen (Hebrews 11:1).



Jeremy at Home

My Choice

Can God be trusted—especially when everything appears wrong? Our logic is very good at making a case against God. But God has a logic all his own, the logic of grace and love.

God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). God promised to make a great nation from Abraham and Sarah – a childless couple. Joseph was shown that he would rule Egypt, but he became a slave and prisoner. God led the Israelites straight to the Red Sea, where the pursuing Egyptians could easily trap and kill them. God selected Paul, a man who was notorious for killing Christians, to be one of the top leaders of the church. I can't help but wonder what the early Christians must have thought about that decision.

The Bible is full of examples of people going through challenging times that make no sense, but God always brings out of it his good purpose.

I believe God still loves Jeremy and still loves me, and that he still has everything under perfect control. I *choose* to trust him. •



Since her son's death, Ann has become a successful Country and Western singer. She takes all her experiences and weaves them into songs of faith, hope, and love. Her songs are simple stories about real life, revealing that God's goodness is reliable through every situation - even the darkest ones. Ann invites you to visit her web site: www.annhartmann.com

Sorry State...

Continued from page 9

Consider this: Only humble people—the meek—can offer a sincere apology.

Attitudes unchecked go from bad to worse. They harden into obsessions. On the national scene they often show up as crusades, vendettas, pogroms, purges—the ugly lexicon of hate.

But what about things that happened generations ago? Can a living generation be held accountable for what their ancestors did? Apparently so. 2 Samuel 21 records a severe famine in Israel in the time of King David. David sought God's advice. He was told: "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death." Centuries before, the Gibeonites had been promised protection as resident aliens in Israel (Joshua 9:15). Saul had broken that pledge. Now David's generation was paying the price. "David asked the Gibeonites, 'What shall I do for you? How shall I make amends...'"

Offenses are personal. To deal with them often takes a personal response. Even on the parental level we can see the power of an apology. When a father or mother or minister sincerely apologizes to a young person for overreacting harshly, immense goodwill can be created. It thaws out the frozen relationship where everyone stumbles around in a half-evasive daze, not sure of what to do next.

Breaking the Cycle

Eveleyn O'Callahan Burkhard, a reconciliation specialist in Ireland with experience in Cambodia, said, "The first step towards peace is to talk truthfully about what went wrong." That takes courage. A sincere apology often clears the air. "I'm sorry we're having this problem." Where wrongdoing is deeply layered it takes stamina to break down barriers. "There are many examples in history of nations who have tried to bury rather than face the past," added Burkhard. "If we try to ignore or bury the past it will haunt us and may even destroy us."

Forgiveness is an act of release. It can be graciously extended after a generous apology is offered. But when there is a refusal to admit that someone somewhere did something very wrong, relationships remain frozen. Human nature being what it is, the next step is often to blame the victims for inflating the situation. "You're making it up. It's not that bad."

And so, the cycle continues. The sickness remains. But the good news is that there is a better way. It often begins with an apology. •



The Office of Reconciliation Ministries, a ministry of the Worldwide Church of God, promotes reconciliation between different ethnic and people groups. Contact them at: www.atimetoreconcile.org

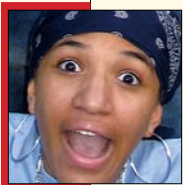
A Week to Change Your Life

Every summer the Worldwide Church of God's Generations Ministries hold a series of camps in many locations around the country.

We'd like you to come to one of them, because we think they are great. But then, we would wouldn't we?

So don't take our word for it. Listen to some of the young people who went last year:

David: Have you ever wished you could take a break from life? Maybe you can't stand having your little brother or sister annoy you any longer or you're fed up with listening to your parents' endless reprimands. Maybe your family is in shambles, grades aren't so good, or you just don't feel loved at all. Maybe you've strayed so far from God you fear he'll never listen to you again. Or maybe you're just looking to have a little fun this summer.



“Camp is the coolest place you can be. It's life-changing. Seriously.”

Melinda: As the bell rings on the last day of school, everyone runs off campus, excited to go home and have no homework to do. They get to sleep in every day for three months and do everything and anything they can think of that's non-educational. But I look forward to something else – sleeping in dorms, waking up early, learning something new every day, and having no Internet access. No, it's not boot camp – it's one of my favorite places in the world. It's SEP! (*Last year, Generation Ministries' camps were called Spiritual Enrichment Programs-SEP*)

Jasmine: In our church area, my dad is the pastor. Every week he gives sermons but typically they are geared towards the adults. One other problem that I have personally is that our particular church doesn't have many teens. Because of that, we don't have a big



teen/youth program. Also, being a Christian teen, at least in my school or my area, there aren't many places that I can go to talk to other Christian teens about Jesus and learn more about him.

Abel: The greatest joy I have is having friends who love our Lord Jesus Christ. In school, it is not easy to find classmates who love Jesus. As a Christian, I often get looked down and laughed at because of my Christian views. SEP has expanded the boundaries of my relationships, and I know better how to relate with non Christian friends in school.

Roger: SEP is the coolest place that you can possibly be. It's so awesome, and it's life-changing to many people. Seriously!

Tyler: SEP is a place where the atmosphere alters. It's a place where instead of being discriminated, you're loved no matter what ethnicity, size, or shape you are. It's a place where instead of receiving the cold shoulder or occasional dirty looks, you get someone to look you straight in the eye and talk or play a sport with you on a welcoming level.

You begin to learn the importance of life itself, while having the most fun probably in your entire life.

David: I know, since it is a church hosted camp, the first thing you think of is a bunch of old people



singing hymns in a giant sanctuary, but at SEP, you could be fooled into thinking you're at a rock concert.

Roger: People come to camp for the first time with a negative mindset saying "This is just going to be another ordinary summer camp where all you do is swim and eat and do boring religious stuff," but many teens actually develop into a totally new person in Christ while having fun at the same time. The coolest thing about SEP is that the staff, counselors, and other campers accept you for who you are, just like Jesus does, which means that you don't have to be the

and dodging mosquitoes. I learned that I seem to have a knack for shooting and archery, after coming in second in the girls' camp. (I found it ironic that after growing up in Los Angeles, California, the first time I ever fired a gun was at church camp. I think especially that the dancing is the best part of SEP (there are two dances during the week and two dance classes) because you get to overcome the shyness and fear that keeps some of us from dancing in public at home. At SEP, no one cares if you are a good or bad dancer as long as you try and have a good time.

David: No matter what your situation is, I'm sure that SEP will, at the very least, give some insight into these problems if not change your life completely. Being a camper of 4 or 5 years (I've lost count), believe me when I say that miracles still happen.

Abel: Before coming to SEP, I thought that the whole experience is nothing but to stir up the emotions of children with music, lectures and sports. However, after having gone through SEP myself, I realized that I was wrong. SEP really does change lives. I have witnessed it. I have experienced it.



perfect 100% "religious" person that you think you have to be. There are no perfect people at this camp. Sounds pretty sweet to me.

Alexis: I remember almost crying because I got three meals a day. It was not that I was starved and neglected at home, but in these days, few of us sit down to three meals with our friends and family anymore. I felt very safe being in a place

where the stresses of school and family life were non-existent. The only things I had to worry about at S.E.P were dancing with a boy that was 6-inches shorter than me,

A close friend of mine from a broken family finally found joy and purpose in his life from SEP. I know someone who was often a "troublemaker" in church. He came home from SEP a totally different person. He came home gentle and kindhearted. I cannot also minimize the value of friendships I have made. Having friends all over the USA is cool. We continue our relationships by emails and chats. Because we are teens, we understand each other very well and are able to encourage each other.

Jasmine: That's the good thing about SEP. It's one of the few times during the year where teens can get together and learn about Jesus and incorporate him into their lives. I have to admit that leaving my comfortable bed and bugless house is a bit difficult, but it's all worth it. For that one week, I am able to camp out in the woods just so I can have fun with my friends, and learn more about Jesus Christ.

Crossing Borders

Camp With a Mission

OK, so you've been there, done that and got a drawer full of camp tee shirts. Then perhaps you are ready to expand your Christian growth in a new and challenging way. How about stepping into a foreign culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

As part of our Generations Ministry programs in 2006, we are adding Crossing Borders - an exciting new venture. While maintaining the central focus on growing in Jesus, this new camp will also include education and training in cross-cultural mission, followed by some actual hands on experience in Mexico.

Our other summer camps are directed mainly toward preteens and teens. But this new camp will be open to Christians of any age who have come to know and accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord and who now want to learn how to reach out to others with the good news of salvation.

At this point, we have a camp reserved in Laredo, Texas, and plan to do our work in Mexico within 20 miles of the border around Nuevo Laredo. The camp will run from Monday, June 19, through Sunday, June 26. Don't expect a country Club. The facilities are somewhat rustic, the temperatures will be hot and the days will be long. But it will be worth it.

We will have some recreational activities to have fun and build teamwork. But be prepared for this to be a working

camp. Crossing Borders camp is not designed to be comfortable; it is meant to be transformational. We'll have chapel messages, praise and worship music, private and group devotionals, small group discussions, giftedness surveys, individual counseling, evangelism teaching sessions and role-playing. We'll build the attendee's awareness of his or her personal testimony and explore drama, speech, music, puppetry, clowning, social service and other means to reach out to nonbelievers with the gospel.

Then - we'll take what we learn and apply it in hands-on ways across the border. We'll involve ourselves in service projects, church services, park ministry, music concerts, tract dissemination, one-on-one discussion with the local people, and other appropriate outreach activities.

Does this sound like something you would like to do?

If you are looking for new challenges to stimulate growth in your Christian walk, if you are ready to reach outside yourself and invest in the lives of others, if you can accept the challenge of operating in a different culture, and if you want to share your heart and testimony with others who need to know Jesus, this camp may be just right for you.

Crossing Borders is open to any interested Christian, so spread the word to your friends, relatives, neighbors, classmates and others. •

Alexis: SEP is a safe place, a place where you can be yourself without worrying about what Mom/Dad/school/your friends expect, and where you can still feel like you matter as an individual.

Melinda: SEP, or Spiritual Enrichment Program, is the best thing a pre-teen or teen can do with their summer. They get the opportunity to participate in many team sports, like basketball, volleyball, and water polo, plus activities like high-ropes courses, rock climbing, paintball, canoeing, dance, archery, and other exciting things that you just don't get the chance to do in P.E. at school! All these activities are done with your dorm members, who, in the short week you are together, will become as close as family to you.

But definitely the best thing you get out of SEP is the "spiritual enrichment." Every morning the whole camp gathers for what I've heard some campers call "intense" praise and worship and a great chapel message. Then at the end of the day, we gather again to worship God, who every camper comes to fall in love with during the week.

David: Hey, if you're looking for a good time, there's plenty of activities made for that: canoeing, basketball, archery, swimming, volleyball, rifle shooting, and for the ladies, even dancing. Most importantly, it is a place to be accepted. Even if you're skeptical about this whole God and Jesus thing, I can assure that you'll find friends in the campers and staff there.

Tyler: SEP places kids of all ages in a fun, spiritual bubble that is truly everlasting in your memory.

Roger: Oh, by the way, I forgot to mention that the daily SEP worship services totally rock!

Does this sound like fun? Then check our web site www.wcg.org/youth/ for details of the SEP Camp closest to you.

If you'd like to come, we'd love to have you for a few fun-filled days that really can change your life! •

For more information or to apply, send an e-mail to lee.berger@wcg.org or write to Lee Berger, P.O. Box 554, Round Rock, Texas, 78680 or call him at 1-512-930-0503.

The cost is \$345 per camper.

A matter of perspective

By Angie L. Ruble

"This is the worst day ever!" my sleepy preschooler said. "My oatmeal is too hot."

"Just blow on it while you look at those deer out the window," I said. "It'll cool off soon."

"That'll take forever, Mom. Will you blow on it?"

"Sure," I said. "Oh, look at all the deer, Honey. Do you see them?"

"No."

"They're right there, coming up the hill. Don't you see them?"

"No, Mom! If they're right there, why can't I see them?"

A logical question. I bent over to look from his angle. I couldn't see them either. The deck railing was blocking this amazing view. So I quietly picked him up and stood him on a chair.

Beaming, he said, "Oh, Mama! I see them now! I was about to start a "be thankful for God's creation" speech, but stopped short when I realized it's all about perspective. Does God long to show us his enlightened view from above? If we ask would he show us? Or does perspective naturally come with time, hindsight and age?"

I love the story in 2 Kings 6 about Elisha's servant, who was scared because he and Elisha were surrounded by a hostile army and faced sure doom. Elisha requested heavenly perspective for his servant, asking God to open the young man's eyes. God revealed a vast army of fiery horsemen and chariots ready to assist them.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Author Anais Nin once stated, "We don't see things as they are, we see them as **we** are."

The truth is, most days I am a self-centered, panicky control freak, who foregoes prayer and does absolutely everything humanly possible to try to control all the unpredictable things in life. All in the name of peace.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). My son has that, a simple trusting faith. He is content with not seeing the deer because he trusts me that they are there.

As I wash the empty oatmeal bowl I think it's not really seeing everything like God does that is important for us. What's important is having a relationship with God that is built on love and having child-like faith to trust him. Like God told the Jewish exiles in Babylon, "For I know the plans I have for you says the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you" (Jeremiah 29:11).

How's that for perspective? ●

Jump Start is a column for writers who have never been published before. We want to help you see yourself in print. Contributions should be between 500-650 words long, ideally in Word for Windows format. Send to john.halford@wgc.org or to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 5005 Glendora, CA 91740-5005 marked 'Jump Start'.

Left Behind?

Don't you wish they had had something like these camps when you were young? What a difference it might have made.

What a difference it is going to make to hundreds of young people this summer.



But some, sadly, may be left behind.

The WCG as a denomination subsidizes some of the costs of its Generations Ministry camps. The rest is covered by tuition payments made by the campers themselves and from donations given to one of our camp ministries.

Many kids, including those who need the camp experience most and who benefit most from it come from homes that are unable to pay all or part of the tuition. So through Generations Ministry's sponsorship program, individuals and congregations have an opportunity to sponsor a young person who otherwise could not afford to go.

You can sponsor a camper from your congregation, family, or neighborhood directly by offering them financial assistance personally or by doing so through your pastor or youth ministry leader. Another way to help sponsor needy campers is to make a general donation to one of our Generations Camp Ministries. Such donations will be used by that ministry to cover costs, including the scholarshiping of campers with financial need. You can make such donations to a Generations camp ministry by making out a check to the name of the camp and sending it to the camp ministries' mailing address (see this information about each camp ministry on our website at <http://www.wgc.org/youth/>). Such donations will be receipted by that ministry and are tax deductible in accordance with IRS policy. ●

Whatever Happened to Ch

A discussion with Dr. Eddie Gibbs

Christian Odyssey. Church growth was an idea that was popular 15 or 20 years ago. It promised to halt the decline in congregations and turn things around. Why hasn't it worked?

Dr. Eddie Gibbs: Well, it depends upon the criteria by which you judge whether something has worked or not. If you have a lot of previously church people, the insights and techniques of church growth were helpful. In the USA we had a wave of returning baby boomers following Watergate and Vietnam. Many of the boomers resisted traditional Christianity but responded to an approach which was contemporary and which fitted their needs and their cultural context. Some church growth insights were helpful in those contexts.

However, I think that with the wisdom of hindsight, the ideas of Donald McGavran, the founder of the church growth movement, were not really heard in the West. His principles were missionary and outreach principles. In North America particularly, they became marketing principles. In other words, how can I increase my slice of the religious market? The principles were misunderstood – even prostituted.

Outside the US, there was no phenomenon of returning baby boomers. So the standard approach was to remove all the barriers we thought would get in the way of people coming to faith. That was okay when you had folks out there who were coming in your direction – were in your aisle of the spiritual options supermar-

ket, so to speak. But that is not where they came from.

church growth is subject to market forces? There is some brilliant marketing of Christianity. But does it misrepresent the “product”?

EG: It certainly can. If we use marketing techniques to edit the gospel, so that only those aspects which serve our purpose are highlighted, then it is no longer the gospel. There is a tendency to proclaim a gospel that meets people's needs without challenging their priorities or values. We fill our churches with members that are not disciples. There is little evidence of life transformation, particularly amongst those who are simply at the worship service once a week.

It is only when you separate out the 10 percent who are involved beyond the worship service that you see a significant statistical difference in lifestyle. If it is just the general church-going population, there is little difference between



them and the population at large when you look at their attitudes on racism, truth telling, divorce and lifestyle in general.

CO: What are we doing wrong?

EG: We have not recognized a profound cultural shift. From the conversion of the Emperor Constantine until the First World War in Europe and the 1960s in America, churches have lived in a “Christendom” framework. By that I mean most people were at least notionally Christian. They would come to church for weddings and baptisms and funerals.

Under that umbrella the church was a central institution of society and our strategy in communicating good news was “come to us on our terms, to

“There is a tendency to proclaim a gospel that meets people's needs without challenging their priorities or values.”

ket, so to speak. But that is not where they came from.

So has it worked in terms of turning the tide of church going? Clearly no. In North America, if you believe the marketing figures, which I don't, between 39 and 43 percent are supposed to be in church on Sunday. But when you change the research methodology and see who is actually there, it is estimated that only between 18 and 25 percent of the population are actually in church.

CO: Do you think it is a mistake to assume genuine

Church Growth?

events where we are in the majority and in power.” Now we are no longer within a Christendom framework. We are in post-Christendom – some would say a neo-pagan society. In that environment you don’t operate in a “come to us” way. But most church leaders are not trained to function in that environment.

Look at the various positions listed in Ephesians 4:11. This, remember, is a pre-Christendom model of leadership that emphasizes the need for missional leader-



ship. It is apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The pastors and teachers are your settlers – the others are the pioneers. We don’t train pioneers; we train settlers. As Leslie Newbiggin said when he returned from India and settled in Birmingham, we are in a missionary situation but we don’t train missionaries. So we have a chronic shortage of “APE’s” - apostles, prophets and evangelists.

We have to define the church not as a place but as people. Not a gathering but a community. We have got to turn the idea of church inside out.

CO: Is that possible?

EG: Not with the mindset of present leadership. I think we need a recall, just as you have a recall of a defective car model. We need a recall so we can be trained as missionaries.

CO: But you don’t downplay the importance of the local congregation and weekly worship service.

EG: No – not at all. The issue is whether worship finds expression in mission. When worship does not show in witness by word and deed it becomes spiritual self-indulgence.

So for me, the worship service is the heart of mission. It is the pit stop in the race.

We must recognize that the church is as much the church in dispersion as it is when we are gathered. Where is it when it is in dispersion? Where God has placed it to be strategic. So the task then becomes how can we support God’s people in the locations where God has already placed them?

You never “dismiss” a congregation – you disperse it. And if possible you go with them. Get out of your office and whenever you possibly can, be with the members of the church where God has placed them and see what is going on there.

CO: Do you have any words of advice for a pastor who has a crumbling church building, a shrinking congregation and declining income, who does more funerals than baptisms?

EG: They must remember that they are doing a valuable job loving an aging congregation to see them safely to eternity. That is a valid ministry. So, do the traditional things with those folk and do them well. Secondly, be careful of change. Most change they have experienced has been for the worse. But remind them that your concern is also for their children and grandchildren. So ask for permission to do new things apart from what is so meaningful for them. Ask them to be intercessors; old saints are great intercessors. You may be surprised. Some of those older folks are young at heart. They may be ready for their final fling in life.

As a 67-year-old professor, I am on the steepest learning curve of my life. As I look at the emerging churches across the Western world, my students have become my teachers. ●



Edmund Gibbs is the Donald A. McGavran Professor of Church Growth in the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California. In conjunction with Ryan K. Bolger, he has recently published *Emerging Churches*, a controversial and hard hitting analysis of the challenges to Christianity in the postmodern cultures of Britain and America.

As Ugly As Sin

By John Halford

Last summer, we took our grandchildren to the zoo. It was one of those progressive zoos where they try to recreate the animals' natural habitat.

The Monkey House was especially effective. Instead of concrete cages and iron bars, only a plate-glass window separated us from the apes. A sociable orangutan ambled over to get a better look at his visitors. He stared at us for a while with an amiable expression on his moonlike face. Then, discovering he had been sitting on an orange, he pondered it for a moment, and then ate it. The children pointed and giggled.

This orangutan obviously understood the first rule of showmanship: give the crowd what they want. He decided to give them an encore. So he vomited the orange into his hands and proceeded to eat it again.

"Oh gag!" "Yuk!" "That's gross!" "He's sooo revolting," yelled the delighted kids. The ape looked pleased. Obviously he had hit upon a winning formula. So he regurgitated the orange yet again and ate it a third time. And then, egged on by his young supporters, he did it once more.



Confident now of audience reaction, the ape decided to expand his repertoire. The orange, even by his liberal standards, was showing signs of wear. So he smeared the mess on the glass. The children were now falling over themselves with laughter, while we parents and grandparents were looking decidedly queasy.

The show was by no means over. The orangutan had a few more tricks up his sleeve (so to speak) but I'll spare you the details. Suffice it to say that my grandchildren have never forgotten that encounter.

Neither have I. As I watched the impromptu display of gastronomic versatility, it occurred to me that that is how you and I must look to God when we sin.

No Laughing Matter

If that ape could have seen himself as we saw him, he might have behaved differently. But an animal does not have a conscience. We do. We have a sense of shame, and we know certain behavior is wrong. But we don't always understand how wrong.

Obviously, in a civilized society, murder and robbery are unacceptable. But what about minor, white-collar crimes, or being a little greedy? Or an "innocent" affair? A drunk, providing he isn't hurting anybody, can be quite entertaining. Some people might even egg him on, like the children did that orangutan.

So where do we draw the line? Who decides?

God says *he* does. And he tells us that wrong living (he gives it the politically incorrect label "sin") kills us in the end.

But God wants to get rid of all our sin so we can live forever, in peace, with him and one another.

The point is, God does not think sin is a laughing matter. But because he loves us, and wants us to be with him forever, he has provided the means by which we can be cleaned up.

Paul, in his epistle to the Romans explained it like this: "Out of sheer generosity, he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we are in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ. God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of that world to clear the world of sin." (Romans 3:22-25, *Message Version*).

Unfortunately, the image of the man on the cross has become more of a cliché than a life-changing reality.

So I want to take you to the edge of another crowd. Not at a zoo this time, but to a hill just outside the walls of Jerusalem. It is a spring day, about 2,000 years ago.

The crowd has gathered to watch a public execution. The victim is about to be nailed to his cross. A few hours ago, he had been a strong and vigorous man, in his prime. But in accordance with Roman custom, he has been thrashed with a brutal scourge. It has inflicted terrible wounds. His tormentors also pushed a crown made from thorn bushes down on his head. His face, which once may have been rug-

Salome, Always a Mom

By Joyce Catherwood

(Matthew 20:20-23)

gedly handsome, is now disfigured to the point of being hideous. People draw back in revulsion. The victim is as ugly as sin.

Xtreme Punishment

What has he done to deserve such punishment? Was he a mass murderer? Or a vicious criminal? A terrorist, responsible for destroying many innocent lives?

No one seemed to know for sure.

“Apparently he said he was the son of God,” explains one of the bystanders.

It was true. His enemies had tried to trump up charges against him by bribing false witnesses, but they kept contradicting one another. In the end, he gave his accusers the evidence they needed.

“Tell us plainly, are you the Christ, the Son of God?” asked the high priest.

“Yes,” the accused man had replied, “it is as you say.”

That was enough to have him crucified. In one way, this was a terrible miscarriage of justice. But in another, it was not. You see, the Son of God, Jesus, had come to die, not for what he was, but for what we had become. He was accepting the consequences for what we have done.

Hey, wait a minute! That’s a bit extreme, isn’t it? Maybe if you sin by killing someone, or do something else really bad. But for the kind of things most of us have done, wouldn’t a rap over the knuckles, or maybe a good strong talking-to be enough?

That is the problem with judging sin by our own standards. God knows the long-term consequences of behavior that we think is “not too bad”, or even funny. Sin, all sin, when reflected in the light of God’s love, looks very ugly indeed. Our heavenly Father does not want us to be slaves to sin any more than we would want our children to be dinner guests of that orangutan.

What can we do about it? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. That’s another dilemma. We can do nothing about it. Even if we stop sinning now, it cannot erase the damage already done. You and I need someone to save us and clean up our mess. That explains what is happening on this hill. Suddenly sin is no laughing matter. This is what “Jesus died for you” means.

You wait during the hours of agony as Jesus’ life drains away. Some in the crowd are taunting and mocking the tortured man. “If you’re the son of God, come down off the cross.” “He saved others, but he can’t save himself.” You breathe a sigh of relief as Jesus calls out “It is finished”, and dies.

Three days later he is alive again. Alive in a way no human has ever been. Shining, radiant, eternal. And his eternal resources are focused on helping you be like him, beautiful as only a person freed from the bondage of sin can be. ●

“Yes, Jesus had said he was going to die, but we assumed his work had just begun. My husband, Zebedee, and I and both of our sons, James and John, were swept up in the contagious energy of his ministry. Everywhere Messiah went he was touching lives, healing the sick and he had even raised the dead. We thought his influence would just grow and grow, finally leading to his messianic rule from Jerusalem

“I was overjoyed to follow Jesus and care for his needs as though he were my own son. He nicknamed my boys ‘Sons of Thunder’ because of their enthusiastic support. He and John had become best of friends. So as we traveled to Jerusalem one day, it seemed natural to me to ask Jesus for a favor. With James and John by my side, I knelt before Jesus and asked him if my sons could have prominent positions in his kingdom.

“His response confused me. He said he didn’t think we really understood what we were asking. He asked James and John if they were able to drink of the cup he was to drink.

“They said, ‘Yes, of course!’ They could drink of the cup. We were not sure exactly what he meant by that. I did recall that he had recently told us he would be mocked and flogged and crucified. But his influence and miracles were so impressive, it didn’t seem possible that could ever happen.

“I should never have made my request, even though Jesus’ response had been patient and considerate. The other disciples overheard and before long a huge argument broke out about who should be the greatest. The ten indignantly turned on James and John. Jesus had to step in to straighten everyone out, explaining the greatest must first become a servant.

“Our hopes and spirits soared after Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. But our dreams were quickly dashed to pieces when Jesus was arrested. The trial was such a mockery. Jesus was slapped and spat on, and the crowds turned vicious.

“This strong, tender-hearted young man had done nothing but good to others. Yet he was brutally beaten. Even the execution soldiers were shocked at the extent of his wounds. I watched with unbelieving eyes, determining not to leave him even though the other disciples had fled for their lives.

“The grim process dragged through the afternoon. My son John had also stayed by him and comforted Mary as she knelt in unspeakable sorrow before the cross. As he struggled for breath, Jesus asked John to care for his mother. My brave son took Mary’s hand and gently led her back to us. “Then Jesus died. Three days later, he was raised from the dead, and we were overjoyed beyond words. But it was at the foot of the cross I finally began to understand what it meant to follow him. How foolish of us to ask for prominence. Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Easter in the Church

By Paul Kroll

The death and resurrection of Jesus' have been the central events of the church's faith confession since it was founded (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). It's not surprising that the Lord's crucifixion and rising to life should become the focal points of communal Christian worship and remembrance.

There is evidence that the apostolic church celebrated Jesus Sunday morning resurrection in its worship gatherings on the first day of each week (Acts 20:7; 2 Corinthians 16:2). The Lord's death was remembered in the bread and wine communion that was probably part of Christian fellowship meals (Luke 22:19-20).

The "Easter" festival begins

At some point in the first two centuries, it became customary in the church to have a yearly celebration of the Lord's death and resurrection called "Pascha." It is the same word used for "Passover" in the Greek ver-

cha) in I Corinthians 5:7, he is affirming that the God who acted mightily in ancient Israel's release from Egyptian bondage, typified by the Passover, is the same God who has acted in Christ to free us eternally from all spiritual prisons of sin and death.

Originally, the great Paschal celebration of the church was a unified commemoration of the suffering, death, resurrection, and Ascension of the Lord. Only later were the events divided into separate commemorations, with the ascension observance being moved to the 40th day of the Easter season.

Gradually, in the early centuries of the church, with an increasing emphasis on Holy Week and Good Friday, Pascha took on its distinctive character as the Christian celebration of the resurrection. Good Friday commemorated Jesus' crucifixion and death. The feast of the resurrection, which completed the whole work of redemption, became gradually the most prominent part of the Christian Pascha, and identical with our Easter Sunday.

Since as early as the 4th century, Resurrection Sunday or what we call "Easter Sunday" in the English language has been the center of the Christian liturgical year and calendar.

When to observe Easter?

Before a.d. 325, Christian communities in different regions celebrated Easter on a variety of dates and on different days of the week, and not always on Sunday.

However, the Christian Council of Nicea of that year issued the "Easter Rule."

Nicea decided, quite naturally, that the resurrection of Jesus should be celebrated by all churches throughout the world on the same Sunday.

The council standardized the Easter observance date so that Easter is the first Sunday following what is

sion of the Scriptures. Our Easter¹ season has grown out of the old Pascha celebration. In time, the Pascha became observed throughout the church.

The early church saw the direct symbolic continuity between the slaughtered lamb of the Passover and the crucified Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. When Paul speaks of Christ as "our Passover Lamb" (Greek, pas-

¹ Some claim the word "Easter" is "pagan" because it may have once been associated with ancient heathen gods. However, this spring worship season was a time for celebration and worship of Christ in Christendom long before the English word

"Easter" was adopted by English-speaking Christians. The objection against "Easter" is irrelevant in other nations because the word is not used for the Christian spring festival. In most other languages of the world, the name for the festival is derived

from Pesach or Pesah, the Hebrew name of the Jewish Passover. Our "Easter" is the French Paques, Italian Pasqua, Spanish Pascua, Scottish Pask, Dutch Paasch or Pashen, Danish Paaske, and Swedish Pask, to name a few.



“Easter is a time when we can reflect on and contemplate the meaning of the wondrous events of our salvation”



called the Paschal Full Moon (pronounced “Pas-Kul”) for the year. Astronomically, it’s too complicated to explain here. Suffice it to say that this means the date of Easter Sunday can range between March 22 and April 25, depending on the lunar cycle. This year Easter falls on Sunday, April 16.

The Eastern Orthodox churches use the same calculation, but base their Easter date on the old Julian calendar and use different Paschal Full Moon tables. The situation is that the Orthodox Easter Sunday in most years follows the Western Easter by one or more weeks.

Discussions began in the last century in hopes of forging a possible worldwide agreement on a consistent date for Easter. Various proposals have been put forth by churches, Christian organizations and clergy of various denominations. One idea is to disregard the moon altogether in determining the date of Easter. None of the proposals have been adopted by any church up to now.

Whatever change in the Easter date occurs in the future, it won’t affect our worship. Christians do not observe days or “holy time.” They use such days and seasons as opportunities to worship Christ. Easter is a time when we can reflect on and contemplate the meaning of the wondrous events of our common salvation – a pure gift of God in Christ.

May you have an inspiring and blessed Easter worship season. ●

In Other Words

Keep on walking

By James R. Henderson

In developing nations people walk for miles along roads. In crowded and remote areas, day and night, you see people walking. There is a saying used by the Kikuyu tribe of Kenya – “Kuguru ni irata thi”, meaning “the foot goes all over the world”.

It is not unusual for individuals to walk long distances to collect water, food and firewood. I know some Christians who trek 2 to 3 miles weekly to attend church! What perseverance! Would you do that?

The Kikuyu slogan stresses the need to persevere. Our feet are gifts, and we need to use them to accomplish whatever our goals are.

Biblically, we have a choice of how to

use our feet. With them we can “run to evil”, bringing destruction and pain both to ourselves and to others (Isaiah 59:7), or we can use them for the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). We can persist in doing wrong and harmful things, or we can keep on walking in faith and in love, reflecting how Jesus walked on this earth.



Some days we may be tempted to put our feet up and forget the Christian walk. It’s too hard to go on. We feel tired. Jesus knows that feeling. He was sometimes weary. But for us he pressed on and walked the path to Calvary. That same Jesus is with us now, and he’ll help us get up when we get weary. With him we can persevere. With him, some days, we can walk on water!

Will We Live Again?

A study of 1 Corinthians 15:1-23

By Mike Morrison

Every spring, Easter reminds Christians that Jesus rose from the dead. His resurrection was certainly good news for him, and we rejoice that our Friend lives again. But Easter tells us more than that—it tells us something about our life, too.

A core component of the gospel

Paul wrote his letter to the church at Corinth to address several problems and questions that the members had. In chapter 15, he responds to the idea that no one will be resurrected from the dead.

Paul begins with a teaching the people had already accepted: “I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you” (verses 1-2).

He describes the main points of the gospel: “...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (vv. 3-4). We are saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Since Paul is focusing on the resurrection, he catalogs the eyewitness evidence: “He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared



“We do have hope for a future life and it hinges on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born” (vv. 5-8).

We have all seen him, Paul is saying, and you can verify that for yourself, because most of those witnesses are still alive. In verses 9-10 he digresses about his calling as an apostle; then he concludes: “This is what we preach, and this is what you believed” (v. 11).

All in vain?

With this foundation, Paul begins to reason: “But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (vv. 12-14).

The apostles are witnesses of the fact that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. It therefore makes no sense for anyone who believes the gospel to teach that there is no resurrection, because they have already accepted a message that proclaims a resurrection. If the message is defective at its core, it is pointless to preach it, and everyone ought to quit and go home.

And if the message is wrong, the apostles are liars: “We are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead” (v. 15).

But the problem becomes even greater than that. Paul points out another logical consequence: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (v. 17). The gospel message proclaims that Jesus died for our sins—but if the gospel message is wrong about his resurrection, then we have no reason to believe the other part of the message, that his death takes care of our sins. The message of resurrection is logically connected to the message of crucifixion. If one is false, the other is as well.

And if people die without any forgiveness, without any hope of living again, then it was pointless for them to accept the gospel: “Those also who have fallen asleep

in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men” (vv. 18-19).

In this life, we run the risk of being persecuted for Christ. We give up the temporary treasures and pleasures of this world, but if this life is all we get, why should we give anything up? If we gave it all up for a message that wasn't even true, we would be rightly ridiculed.

Lectionary Readings for

April-May 2006

Jesus the first of many

But the gospel says that in Christ we do have hope for a future life, and it hinges on the resurrection of Jesus. Easter commemorates not only the fact that Jesus came back to life—it becomes a promise to us that we will live again, too. If he did not rise again, we have no hope, either in this life or the next. But he did, and therefore we do have hope.

Paul reaffirms the good news: “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (v. 20). The word firstfruits is highly significant. In ancient Israel, the first grain to be harvested each year was carefully cut and offered in worship to God. Only then could the rest of the grain be eaten (Lev. 23:10-14). When they offered the firstfruits, they were acknowledging that all their grain was a gift of God; the firstfruits offering represented the entire harvest.

When Paul calls Jesus the firstfruits, he is saying that Jesus is a promise of a much greater harvest yet to come. He is the first to be resurrected, but he represents many more who will also be resurrected. Our future depends on his resurrection. Not only do we follow him in his sufferings, we also follow him into his glory (Rom. 8:17).

Paul does not see us as isolated individuals—he sees us as belonging to a group. But which group? Will we be people who follow Adam, or those who follow Jesus?

“Death came through a man,” Paul says, and in the same way, “the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (vv. 21-22). Adam was the firstfruits of death; Jesus was the firstfruits of resurrection. If we are in Adam, we share in his death. If we are in Christ, we share in his resurrection.

The gospel says that all believers will be made alive in Christ. That is not just a temporary benefit in this life—it is something we will enjoy in eternity. “But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him” (v. 23). Just as surely as Jesus rose from the grave, we will as well, rising to a new and incredibly better life. Rejoice! Christ has risen, and so shall we! ●

Questions for discussion

- Everyone who saw the resurrected Christ is now dead. Is their eyewitness testimony still good? (vv. 5-8)
- Why would anyone want to preach that there is no resurrection? (v. 12)
- Does the Christian faith have any value for life before death? (v. 19)
- Is it fair for Adam to determine the fate of all his descendants? (v. 22)

Many churches assign passages of Scripture to be read on each Sunday: passages from the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the epistles. This is called a lectionary—from the Latin word *lectio*, meaning “reading.” The readings below are based on the Revised Common Lectionary, which is used by many churches. (Catholic, Lutheran and Episcopal churches may use a slightly different lectionary.) Sermons are often based on the readings. We are now in year B of the three-year cycle.

Readers have told us that they find it helpful to use this lectionary as a basis for their personal Bible reading and study. Here are the assigned scriptures for April and May.

April 2

Psalm 51
Jeremiah 31:31-34
John 12:20-33
Hebrews 5:5-10

April 9 - Palm Sunday

Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey
Psalm 31:9-16
Isaiah 50:4-9
Mark 11:1-11; 15:1-39
Philippians 2:5-11

April 13 - Maundy Thursday

Jesus washes the disciples' feet
Exodus 12:1-14
Psalm 116
John 13:1-17, 31-35
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

April 15 - Good Friday

Jesus is crucified
Psalm 22
Isaiah 52:13-53:12
John 18-19
Hebrews 10:16-25

April 16 - Easter

Rejoice! Christ has risen from the dead!
Psalm 118
Isaiah 25:6-9
John 20:1-18
Acts 10:34-43

April 23

Psalm 133
John 20:19-31
Acts 4:32-35
1 John 1:1-2:2

April 30

Psalm 4
Luke 24:36-48
Acts 3:12-19
1 John 3:1-7

May 7

Psalm 23
John 10:11-18
Acts 4:5-12
1 John 3:16-24

May 14

Psalm 22:25-31
John 15:1-8
Acts 8:26-40
1 John 4:7-21

May 21

Psalm 98
John 15:9-17
Acts 10:44-48
1 John 5:1-6

May 28

Psalm 1
John 17:6-19
Acts 1:15-26
1 John 5:9-13



Hmm...

God does not love you because you are incredibly important. You are incredibly important because God loves you.

Dwight Pryor

The Christian community is interested in spirituality because it is interested in living. We give careful attention to spirituality because we know, from long experience, how easy it is to get interested in ideas of God and projects for God and gradually lose interest in God, alive, deadening our lives with the ideas and projects. This happens a lot. Because the ideas and projects have the name of God attached to them, it is easy to assume that we are involved with God. It is the devil's work to get us worked up thinking and acting for God and then subtly detach us from a relational obedience and adoration of God, substituting ourselves, our godlike egos, in the places usually occupied by God.

**Eugene Petersen,
Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places.**

"Finding something you love to do when you are a child is one of the keys to happiness in adult life. If, when you grow up, people are willing to pay you to do the thing you love to do, then you've got it made!"

**Edward M. Hallowell, MD, writing in
The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness.**

"The law might not change the hearts, but it can restrain the heartless."

Martin Luther King

"It is hard to believe that a man is telling the truth when you know that you would lie if you were in his place."

Henry Louis Mencken

"From gloomy saints, good Lord deliver us!"

Theresa of Avila,

"The best thing about the future is that it only comes one day at a time."

-Abraham Lincoln

Letters to God from Children

Dear God, did you mean for giraffes to look like that or was it an accident?

Norma

Dear God, please put another holiday between Christmas and Easter. There is nothing good in there now.

Amanda

Dear God, Thank you for the baby brother but what I asked for was a puppy. I never asked for anything before. You can look it up.

Joyce

God, I read the bible. What does beget mean? Nobody will tell me.

Love Alison

Dear God, is it true my father won't get in Heaven if he uses his golf words in the house?

Anita

Dear God, maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they each had their own rooms. It works out OK with me and my brother.

Larry

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