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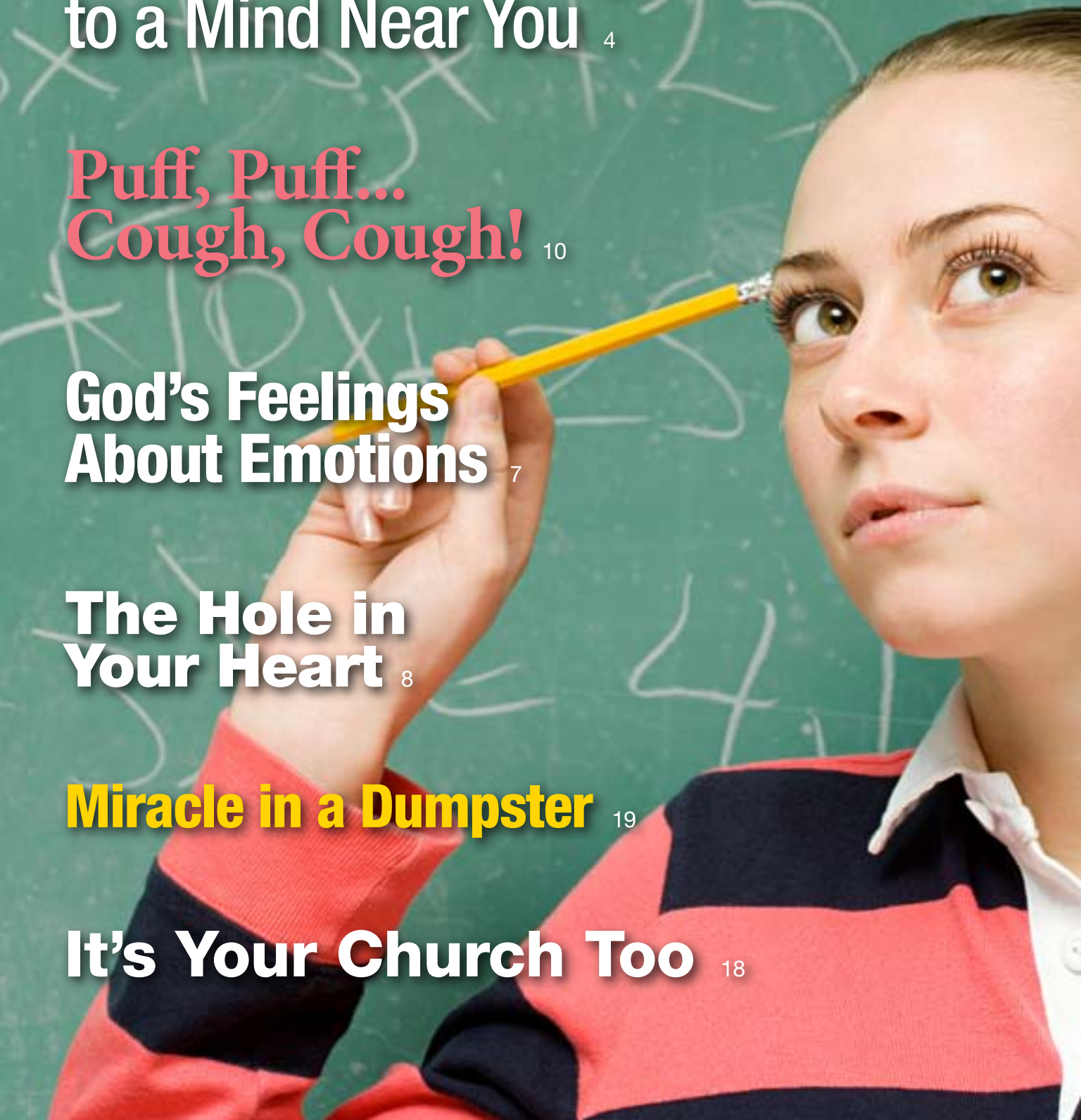
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# Protect Your Brain!

**W**hen my daughter Sharon was just a little girl, she loved to play outdoors. But like all children 3 to 4 years of age, she occasionally lost her balance and fell. It was no big deal—except when she fell on concrete or hard pavement. On these occasions, it seemed that her face was always taking the brunt of the fall! Her legs and hands would be fine, while her face seemed to be getting more than the normal number of scrapes and bruises.

After several such falls, I asked her if she was putting her hands out to catch herself and lessen the impact of the fall. She told me that she wasn't doing so because she didn't want to hurt her hands. She had decided that her hands were very important to her. After all, she needed them to play. Her face—well, she couldn't really see it except in the mirror and a bump there didn't interfere with her play.

**Sadly, many young people today are falling on their brains—that is, they don't know how to protect their brains from danger.**

This conversation led to falling lessons in our living room where the carpet was the softest. There I explained how she could use her hands to break her fall and protect her face and, most importantly to her, do so without seriously hurting her hands. I demonstrated the technique and had her do the same. From that time forward, there were a lot fewer bumps and bruises to her face. Now years later, she and I both laugh when we recall those falling lessons in the living room.

Perhaps you recall things you did as a child that weren't so smart. I do. If we're honest, we will have to admit that we all did some pretty stupid things. Part of the reason we do dumb things when we're young is because our brains haven't fully matured.

In this issue we bring you some of the latest research showing how our brains develop and how we transition from one style of thinking as teens to another as adults. In addition to this matter of brain development, we've also included information about drugs, alcohol, emotions, smoking and health—from God's perspective.

Sadly, many young people today are falling on their brains—that is, they don't know how to protect their brains from danger as they're growing up. Of course, this problem is far more serious than a little scrape to one's face. Studies continue to document the penalties young people pay for unsound thinking. For example, a recent report by the Mental Health Council of Australia asserts that "the use of cannabis [marijuana], particularly among young people, substantially increases the risk of mental illness" ([www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,20921083-421,00.html](http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,20921083-421,00.html)).

In the United States, scholars at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill likewise found that sexual activity and drug use by teens leads to depression. It is no surprise that teen depression is so high when so many have sex (almost 50 percent), drink alcohol (45 percent) and use marijuana (22 percent) ([www.cwfa.org/articles/12251/BLI/dotcommentary/index.htm](http://www.cwfa.org/articles/12251/BLI/dotcommentary/index.htm)).

Why not find a comfortable chair in your living room and read this issue to learn how you can better protect your brain?



*Vertical Thought* is a biblically based magazine of understanding for young people ages 12-22. Our name, *Vertical Thought*, is derived from Colossians 3:1-2, which tells us to think about godly things "which are above, where Christ is." *Vertical Thought* is published quarterly by the United Church of God, an International Association, 555 Technecenter Drive, Milford, OH 45150. © 2007 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited.

Publisher: United Church of God, an International Association

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Staff: Scott Ashley, Dan Dowd, Larry Greider, Doug Horchak, Amanda Stiver, Randy Stiver, Ken Treybig, Rachel Venish, Shaun Venish, Kristin Yarbrough Copy editors: Becky Bennett, Mike Bennett, Tom Robinson Web design: Aaron Booth Editorial reviewers: James Capo, Todd Carey, Paul Luecke, Doug Johnson, Jim Servidio

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**J**ared Dion had been out drinking with his friends the night he disappeared. An athletic, 21-year-old sophomore, he was a member of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse wrestling team and had been an outstanding athlete in his high school days.

That night, Jared didn't look any different from any of the dozens and dozens of other college students seen leaving one of the local bars. He lost track of his friends and evidently wandered into Riverside Park.

He must have eventually found himself on the bluffs above the river. Whether he missed the warning signs or just wasn't in any condition to pay attention to them, he came closer and closer to danger. Suddenly he slipped over the edge and into the Mississippi River.

Jared was an average swimmer, and he probably tried swimming back to shore after the shock of the extremely cold water hit him. However, the strong Mississippi current likely pulled him under.

Five days later authorities pulled Jared's bloated body from the river's frigid waters. His death was ruled an accident. The autopsy discovered that he had consumed enough alcohol to have a .28 blood alcohol level—nearly three times the level for a person to be considered legally intoxicated in Wisconsin.

Jared was the seventh local college student this past year to die from drowning after a night of binge drinking. As many as 1,400 deaths a year in the United States are linked to college binge drinking (classified as five or more drinks at one sitting), according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Sadly, these needless deaths could all have been avoided had the students obeyed God's instructions to not get drunk (see, for example, Ephesians 5:18).

# MATURITY

## Coming Soon to a Mind Near You

Alcohol and drugs can arrest the mind's normal development. That is, if impaired thinking doesn't kill you first!

by Dan Dowd

## Another reason

Interestingly, research now shows that there is an additional reason for young people to avoid binge drinking besides that of obeying God and staying alive. Binge drinking impacts brain development, especially the younger the individual is. Scientists are finding that this is because the adolescent brain is undergoing a shift in the areas where decisions are processed.

Alcohol can inhibit, or even rewire, neuron development not only in the developing areas of the brain, but also in areas already developed. However, the teenage brain seems to have the ability to rebound if the teen stops using alcohol while this brain development is continuing.

## Normal brain development: the process of maturing

The human brain is an amazing, and mysterious, organ. With an arm muscle or lung, for instance, we can easily identify stages of development, from babyhood to maturity. But the brain—delicate gray matter encased in solid bone—is a bit more challenging.

Human beings go from knowing nothing to comprehending and controlling our physical world over a period of years. Often in our preschool years, our parents must intervene to prevent us from running into the road. Our young minds can't yet understand the danger.

As we grow into adolescence, our brains continue to make tremendous leaps, but occasionally there are still signs that there are gaps in our understanding.

## There is mounting evidence that the number of neurons in the brain continues to grow and develop throughout childhood and into early adulthood.

### How were you thinking?

"What were you thinking?" How many times have we heard that? Perhaps it was said after a particularly embarrassing moment or after a near accident. Yet a better question might be: "How were you thinking?"

At a certain age in life, usually in the middle teenage years, we can't wait to grow up. We look forward to our final years of schooling and anxiously await being able to drive a car or old enough to buy alcohol. These are the types of steps we see as hallmarks of being an adult and being independent. In many respects this is a positive development—so we don't end up living with our parents forever!

In the modern world, however, music, movies and magazines all promote their ideas of an adult lifestyle to younger and younger people who may not be fully equipped mentally and emotionally to handle them.

According to research done by neuroscientist Dr. Deborah Yurgelun-Todd, teenagers and adults process information and make judgments (decisions) using different parts of the brain. She and other colleagues at the McLean Hospital Brain Imaging Center in Boston, Massachusetts, discovered this using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to scan brains.

The research showed that adults tend to use the frontal lobe portions of the brain, while teenagers use their amygdalae

(groups of neurons located deep within the medial temporal lobes). The frontal lobe seems to regulate behavior and be involved in decisions regarding right and wrong and cause/effect relationships. By way of comparison, the amygdalae are involved in more instinctive reactions such as the flight-or-fight response. So the amygdalae seem to be more emotional and more reactive in response to stimuli, while the frontal lobes exercise more control over impulsive behavior.

## The changing brain

Without all the scientific jargon, this means the teenage brain is not yet as fully developed as it will be as an adult brain. In fact, there is mounting evidence that the number of neurons in the brain continues to grow and develop throughout childhood and into early adulthood.

As a teenager moves into adulthood, there seems to be a shift in where the brain routes judgment calls—from the amygdalae to the frontal lobe. That is, the brain transitions from making decisions from a more emotionally-based assessment of events to a more rationally-based approach.

Throw into this mix the abuse of alcohol or illegal drugs, or risky behavior in general, and it becomes even more difficult for the adolescent or young adult mind to fully appreciate the consequences of some choices.

This is not to say that the youthful brain does not think rationally or that young people are not held responsible for their actions by God (Ecclesiastes 11:9). It is just that the brain is still going through development. Sometimes it is more rational, and sometimes it is more emotional.

And sometimes it simply doesn't consider the consequences of certain choices, as shown by the seven binge-drinking college students who drowned in the Mississippi River last year and the hundreds of others who also died while abusing alcohol. This is where obedience to God's commands on not getting drunk offers an extra level of protection. And herein lies a great truth: God's way of life is *always* the best way of life—for young and old.

## Keys to vertical thinking

God's Word brought to light these issues more than 3,000 years ago in the book of Proverbs. A good review of many of these principles can be found at the Web site of our parent organization, the United Church of God (see [www.ucg.org/brp/brp0701pt1](http://www.ucg.org/brp/brp0701pt1)).

God recorded for us various cautions and instructions on excessive drinking (Proverbs 23:29-35), wrong associations (Proverbs 24:1-2), the reward of wisdom (Proverbs 24:3-4) and many other topics. The premise of these proverbs is not to limit the possibilities of youth but rather to help young adults make positive transitions into adulthood. Study God's instructions and apply what you learn. These choices will serve you well now and in the future.

**Dan Dowd** is a husband, father and the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Milwaukee, Oshkosh and Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin.

**Question: What's wrong with using street drugs like marijuana?**

**Answer:** God wants everyone to have a good physical life (John 10:10; 3 John 2) and then, through acceptance of His way of life, receive eternal life (John 3:16). The connection human beings make with God is through our minds—the organ that allows us to determine and complete our actions.

Recognizing how vitally important one's mind is, Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart [mind] with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." The problem with illegal drugs is that they destroy or impede our ability to think soundly. When we don't have a sound mind, it becomes much more difficult to have a relationship with our Creator.

Another problem with drugs is that they damage our health ([www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,20921083-421,00.html](http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,20921083-421,00.html)). The Bible teaches us that because our bodies are to be the temples (places of residence) for God's Spirit, we need to take care of them. Doing so glorifies—shows respect to—God who made us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Then there is the important addiction issue addressed below.

**Q: It seems everyone around me is using drugs. What's wrong with just trying it once to see what it's like?**

**A:** Many people have gotten hooked on drugs after deciding that they just wanted to try them once. So to chance this at

# What Does God Think of Drugs?

Through the principles found in the Bible, we can know what He thinks about this modern issue.

by David Treybig

all is utterly dangerous. Some drugs are physically addictive, affecting some people even more strongly than others. In addition, people get hooked on the high—the euphoric feeling they have while under the influence of the drug. It feels so good that they want to do it again and again and will do just about anything—including illegal and immoral behavior—just to get another "fix" so they can again enjoy the effects of the drug. A wise person will not take the chance of getting hooked, which amounts to idolatry—putting other things before God and his laws.

Sadly the character issue is often overlooked. But it is absolutely vital. God wants people to develop righteous character in this life in preparation for the next one. Righteous charac-

ter is developed by determining right from wrong, choosing to do what is right and then following through with the proper action. It is a matter of character to choose not to do what is illegal, disrespectful of God and potentially damaging to our health and spiritual well-being.

**Q: What's the difference between using alcohol in moderation and drugs?**

**A:** God permits the use of alcohol in moderation and within legal limits (see Romans 13:1; Judges 9:13; 1 Timothy 5:23)—legal issues being age, driving, location, etc. Christians are not to be "heavy drinkers," but to be self-controlled and moderate (Titus 1:7-8; 2:3, New Living Translation). Moderation means using good sense so as to not come close to becoming drunk. Drunkenness is a sin that can keep a person out of God's Kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Studies have shown that the moderate use of alcohol can actually be good for your health ([www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/alcohol.html](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/alcohol.html)).

Drugs are a different story. Because their use causes intoxication (similar to drunkenness) and is detrimental to one's health, their use is inappropriate for people who want to honor God.

**Q. Since peer pressure is a major cause of youth trying illegal drugs, how can one resist this influence?**

**A.** Learning to resist pressures to do what is wrong is an important part of being a Christian. The book of Proverbs, specifically written as advice for young people, says, "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent" (Proverbs 1:10). When we become adults, we are likewise to resist the world's temptations to sin.

One way to resist negative peer pressure is to spend time with people who don't tempt us to sin. Choose the right kind of friends and associates. God says not to keep company with a drunkard (1 Corinthians 5:11). While we will undoubtedly meet and have to interact with people who break God's laws, if we are wise, we will spend the majority of our time with those who are also striving to live honorable lives.

**Q: Doesn't God want young people to have fun?**

**A:** God tells us to enjoy things that don't cause pain to us or others in the long run. He wants young people to enjoy their youth (Ecclesiastes 11:9) and all that goes with it. This entails the excitement of learning, doing new things and spending time with others who share good values—as well as their knowledge of God (Psalm 5:11), since this knowledge will be the key to getting the most out of life. God also encourages us to enjoy the weekly Sabbath and His Holy Days (Isaiah 58:13; Deuteronomy 12:18; 16:14).

Godly fun is fun we can tell our parents and, later even our grandchildren, all about. Godly fun is always in harmony with God's laws and is something one never regrets. Godly fun doesn't harm our bodies. (For ideas, see the article "Alternative Entertainment 101" from our April-June 2006 issue at [www.verticalthought.org/issues/vt11/entertainment.htm](http://www.verticalthought.org/issues/vt11/entertainment.htm).)

**David Treybig** is the managing editor of *Vertical Thought* and pastors United Church of God congregations in St. Petersburg and Tampa, Florida.

# God's Feelings About Emotions

Why did God give us such a vast array of emotions? Can our emotions help us develop strong connections with Him and our fellow man?

by Larry Greider

**D**id you know that Jesus wept? Christ showed emotion throughout His life on earth as a mortal man. As the Creator of life and the Savior of mankind, we know much about Jesus Christ's humanity by the stories He told and by witnesses' accounts of His life. Did you ever think that His example could teach us about our emotions?

To be alive is to have feelings and passions. Life has its thrills and chills. You can be excited, disappointed, elated and terrified. There is nothing better than to be "in love" or to feel deeply about someone who shows an interest in you.

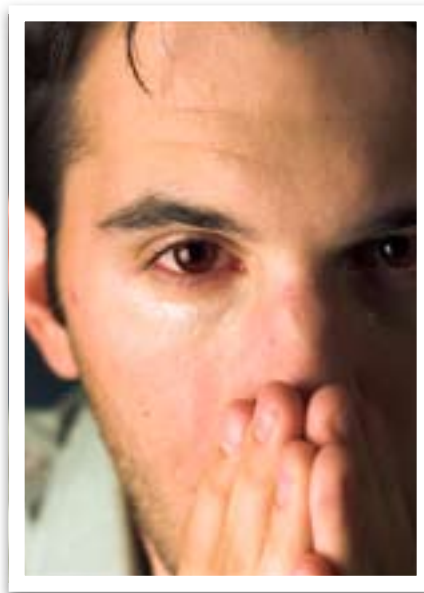
Wouldn't life be dull if there were never laughter or sorrow, only a mechanized tedium of everyday living? What makes life special is our *feelings* about things and other people. It's almost magical when someone makes us laugh or when that special person smiles at us—speaking a wonderful wordless message of interest. The fact that we can blush, get embarrassed or shed a tear makes us the fascinating creatures we are.

## Inside my brain on a plane

While watching a movie on an airplane several years ago, one scene brought a tear to my eye and a lump to my throat, causing me to reach for a tissue deep in my pocket. The stranger next to me, also watching the in-flight movie, noticed my obvious emotion. I'm sure he wondered why I would be so moved since he didn't seem to be affected in the same way.

Later, it was his turn to choke up and dab his eyes only to smile at me and say, "They got me too." After the flick, we talked about many things. To my surprise, he turned out to be an executive of an airline and offered me a gold card to upgrade my travel on subsequent flights. Yes, I did upgrade to first class many times after that, thanks to relating to a perfect stranger initiated by a few tears being tugged out of me by actors in a movie.

My little experience demonstrated that sharing our emotions can help



us relate to people and build bonds of friendship. But just what was it that caused me to become so emotional?

Scientists have discovered that the brain is stimulated in the amygdalae—a pair of neuron groups located deep within the medial temporal lobes—when strong emotions are triggered. This area becomes especially active when we experience intense emotions like passionate desire or fear. The amygdalae are also involved in the storage of memories associated with emotional events. God gave us these amazing little organs. But why?

In the ageless wisdom of the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon wrote that there is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Frankly, there is a time for almost every emotion we have been given. A well-adjusted person isn't afraid of emotion and realizes that this is a gift of God.

## Emotional intelligence

To feel emotions is to be alive. Sadly, people often hide their feelings and sometimes try to artificially alter their feelings with drugs, alcohol or ready-made distractions. Many of today's psychologists are convinced that one's "emotional intelligence," or EQ, is a far better predictor of life success than one's "rational intelligence," or IQ. However, emotions can lead you in the wrong direction if not properly conditioned.

There are emotions that make us feel uneasy. We might feel boredom, impatience, distress, mild embarrassment, fear, apprehension, worry or anxiety.

There are also positive emotional feelings like appreciation, curiosity, excitement, determination, confidence and cheerfulness. To develop emotional intelligence, which is the ability to show the right emotion for the right reason, is to understand God's purpose for our lives.

Jesus wept because He saw people who needed leadership. He saw first-century Jews living in an occupied country as sheep without a shepherd. Today we have many people around the world who seem lost or headed for broken relationships. We also realize there is a clash of civilizations where some view life far differently than we do. It is difficult to fathom the chilling reality of suicide bombers.

To have the right emotions, we need to understand that there are laws governing our relationship with God and with our neighbors. By following God's revealed way of living, we can demonstrate an emotional intelligence that heightens being alive.

## Applaud the good; hate evil

It's important to focus on the positive things in life. As the apostle Paul wrote, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble,

*Continued on page 15*

**T**heir stories are real, but some of the names have been changed.

- John told his story at a drug rehabilitation center. His parents were divorced and his father had been a cocaine addict. His mother worked all the time, but he was close to his grandfather—till his grandfather died when John was 14.

“I was angry that he was taken away. I didn’t understand, I was lonely. I was a latchkey kid. I just started doing stuff because I was so angry, I think” (quoted by Barbara Strauch, *The Primal Teen*, 2003, p. 183).

- Between the ages of 15 and 17, Jo’s gambling began to take up all her time and attention, leading her to skip school and then drop out at 16. “I remember blowing all my wages in a few hours one Friday night. I got really upset and depressed. It’s like drugs, you tell yourself ‘never again’ but deep down you know that as soon as the next pay cheque comes in, you’ll be [gambling again]” ([www.camh.net/egambling/issue8/clinic/griffiths/](http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue8/clinic/griffiths/)).

**Too often when we are suffering from a hole in our heart, another breakup or disappointment by a friend will only deepen the wound.**

- Debbie, 20, described the time that led her to finally call a drug treatment center. “I was in a café, shaking, lonely and sweating profusely. I needed a fix!

“I went further downhill. I was living in a one-roomed, dirty bedsit [apartment] where men visited me so that I could scrape a living and afford my drugs. My life was going nowhere. My body was in ruins” ([www.drugline.org](http://www.drugline.org)).

- “A girl in our town committed suicide recently. She did well in school and came from a family with plenty of money” (quoted by Miriam Kaufman, *Overcoming Teen Depression*, 2001, p. 194).

Some look at these life stories and say, “How could they do those things?” But I’ve felt that bottomless pit of pain, confusion and hopelessness, and more often my question is, “In this insane and sadistic world, how does anyone avoid a breakdown or self-destructing?”

I guess the fact that most of us continue to struggle through each day shows that our will to live and our various coping mechanisms are strong (see sidebar). But even the best coping mechanisms aren’t complete solutions, and too many other things we try only make things worse—sometimes much worse.

The gaping hole we feel, when not masked by self-medication, spurs us to *search*.

### Search for relationships

The hole in our hearts is often displayed in our desperate quest for friendships, and especially for a girlfriend or boyfriend. God knows we need other people to support us through our problems and, better yet, to make our lives interesting and worthwhile (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

If family isn’t helping fulfill that need and if friends are hard to find, we may end up seeking shallow, short-term social interactions, even ones based solely on sex. But these never satisfy.

Too often when we are suffering from a hole in our heart, another breakup or disappointment by a friend will only deepen the wound.

# The HOLE in Your Heart

All of us have deep needs we seek to satisfy. Most of the things we try only paper over the problems—they don’t solve them. What can fill your yearning?

by Mike Bennett

Being a good friend and building strong friendships are vital aspects of a happy life. (See our Oct.-Dec. 2006 issue on friendship at [www.verticalthought.org/issues/vt13/](http://www.verticalthought.org/issues/vt13/) for more on how to achieve this worthwhile goal.) But surprisingly, many have found that even the best friendships never completely fill this hole in our lives.

## Search for meaning

Some of the most honest writing, from European existentialists to grunge garage bands to berserk bloggers, is some of the most painful to read, because it clearly reveals the meaninglessness and hopelessness of the human condition apart from God.

You could make a strong case that the postmodern world has perfected the art of despair. But the troubles are not new. The wisdom of the ancient world, in the person of King Solomon of Israel, recognized a world that was painful, unfair and hopeless even then.

The book of Ecclesiastes was Solomon's ode to meaninglessness without proper orientation in life. Consider these brief excerpts (New Living Translation throughout):

"Everything is so weary and tiresome!" (1:8).

"So now I hate life because everything done here under the sun is so irrational. Everything is meaningless, like chasing the wind" (2:17).

## Things We Use to Try to Fill the Hole

**W**e know the symptoms, but we can't find the cure. Here are some of the coping mechanisms we try:

- TV, movies, video games or other entertainment.
- Food.
- Running away or drifting.
- Sex.
- Alcohol and drugs.

None of these does anything to solve the problem, but they can make things worse—often much worse.

Then there are some socially acceptable coping mechanisms that can have many benefits. These include throwing yourself into sports, work, hobbies, grades, friends and family. But as helpful as they can be, even these good things are incomplete, and can never truly fill the aching void that afflicts all of God's human creation.

Solomon even thought that those who were never born are the most fortunate, "for they have never seen all the evil done in our world" (4:1-3).

"Those who love money will never have enough. How absurd to think that wealth brings true happiness!" (5:10).

## Search for God

If you've read this far, you must be hoping there is a solution to all this hopelessness. And the One who designed you says yes, there is meaning and hope. There is a purpose for your life, one that will truly fill that hole God knows you have.

The solution involves relationships and real meaning in life. It's much deeper than shallow imitations. God says, the natural man, without an awareness of the spiritual, can't comprehend it.

Solomon concludes in Ecclesiastes with an acknowledgment that life's apparent meaningless is resolved through a proper understanding of man's reason for being—to honor and obey God (12:13). And the Bible elsewhere shows that this will be rewarded with blessed, purposeful existence without end.

Consider this:

"See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children, and we really are!" (1 John 3:1).

Our mission—our meaning in life—is to pursue this goal Our Creator wants for us. He wants us to be part of His family—forever! He has important things He wants us to do now, and for all eternity. With God's help we strive now to live as He instructs, which includes helping others achieve this same incredible potential.

These few words on paper can't come close to conveying the earthshaking, mind-boggling and beyond-our-wildest-dreams nature of the future God is preparing for us!

Yes, God knows all our weaknesses—and wants to help us through them (Hebrews 4:14-16). He knows all our weariness—and offers us rest (Matthew 11:28). He knows all our troubles—and offers us comfort. And He wants to help us learn to comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). He knows all our sorrows—and promises to one day wipe away all tears (Revelation 21:4).

If you are serious about wanting to truly fill that hole in your heart, take some time to study what God offers and what He wants from you. The following booklets summarize some of the best biblical highlights: *Making Life Work*, *What Is Your Destiny?* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. Download them or order free copies at [www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets).

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**Mike Bennett**, a minister of the United Church of God, is the managing editor of *United News*. He and his wife Becky and their two daughters live near Cincinnati, Ohio.

# Puff, Puff... Cough, Cough!

*“Smoke! Smoke! Smoke that cigarette.  
“Puff! Puff! Puff—and if you smoke  
yourself to death,  
“Tell St. Peter at the Golden Gate  
“That you hate to make him wait,  
“But you just gotta have another  
cigarette!”*

*“Smoke, Smoke, Smoke That Cigarette,”  
lyrics by Merle Travis for Tex Williams*

by Randy Stiver



**S**o that's their excuse—they've got to have another cigarette, cigar, pipe, joint or whatever inhaled hot poison. Never mind that St. Peter isn't in heaven because people don't go to heaven when they die (request or download a free copy of *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* for details).

In fact, “heaven” is coming to earth in the person of Jesus Christ—soon. Those who are forgiven and obedient will be resurrected to an incredible eternal life in the Kingdom of God like they've never dreamed of before. But there will be a rule there—no smoking allowed.

This rule may make the currently popular, politically correct, antismoking crowd happy, but they've likely got some issues they'll have to deal with too. So what is the deal about smoking, whether tobacco, marijuana or whatever? Is it a sin?

## **Not food, not drink**

When God made man and woman, He gave them dominion over the earthly creation that He had actually made for them in the first place. Then He clearly told them which animals they should use for food and which they should consider unclean and, thus, not food (Leviticus 11).

He gave man all the plants on earth. Some were for animal food, some for human food and some for sheer beauty and other worthy uses. God also provided man liquids to drink like water, milk, teas, juices (the fermented variety only in careful moderation), etc.

Tobacco, however, is neither a human food nor drink. In fact it's poisonous. Only a senseless person would try to eat or drink it. And only a senseless person would try to inhale its smoke while it burns only inches in front of his or her nose! The whole idea of smoking is ludicrous. But ludicrous, crazy ideas have long been popular with a humanity that refuses to follow God's way of living.

I could tell you how bad smoking is for your health. Even King James I of England could tell you that. He called it “a customs lathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs, and the black stinking fume thereof, nearest resembling the horrible Stigian smoke of the pit that is bottomlesse” (*Counterblaste to Tobacco*, 1604).

I could tell you that smoking and smokeless tobacco cause cancer. But that's been done before. “A mid-eighteenth-century detractor who described tobacco as a narcotic akin to opium, warned that snuff-taking was liable to cause the loss of the sense of smell, addiction, nasal tumors and cancer” (“Tobacco,” *The Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Substances*, 1998).

I could tell you all that, but I won't because you already know the scientific reasons why the weed is bad for you. Yet did you just notice how tobacco use causes the loss of smell—and must dull the sense of taste so closely linked with it? Ever wondered why so many smokers frequent restaurants not noted for excellent or even mediocre cuisine? They can't taste or smell well enough to tell the difference. Who wants to go through life with a tongue and nasal cavity that's been cured like a ham in a smokehouse?

## Smoking is against God and neighbor

Jesus listed for us the two greatest commandments of all:

1. Love God with all your heart and being, and
2. Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39).

Does smoking show love toward God? No.

God considers your personal, human body as sacred. "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit . . . and you are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Smoking and chewing tobacco both damage the body. And there is no reason for using tobacco products in these ways except for the temporary gratification of self (and ruining of the self in the long run, which God does not want). That lack of respect and honor for what God calls the temple of His Spirit is itself a sin.

Furthermore, the slavish-addiction aspect of smoking elevates it above God in one's motivations, as explained below.

Does smoking show love toward neighbor? No.

Sitting there sucking hard on a cigarette, pipe or cigar is an action of fundamental selfishness (though it will ultimately hurt oneself). It harms your neighbor, while God says, "Love does no harm to a neighbor" (Romans 13:10). Smoking harms both by the unhealthy effects of second-hand smoke and causing discomfort by selfishly fouling the air for everyone in the vicinity.

Summary: Smoking is sinful because it is self-indulgent, slavishly self-destructive, neighbor-harming and, in all these respects, God-ignoring. "Therefore, to him who knows to do good [as in to not smoke] and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

smoking evangelist, there are the foolishly willing converts. But why do these peers smoke in the first place? And what can you do about it?

Tobacco, marijuana and about any smokable drug can cause body and brain addiction, as mentioned earlier. But becoming an addict (to anything) involves choosing, more and more, to become subservient, slavish, worshipful and groveling to the thing. That means making the thing (in this case smoking) more important than God in your life.

Elevating any other motivating factor in life before the true God is bad news. It's called idolatry. It's called breaking the very first of the great and awesome Ten Commandments. Make no mistake, smoking breaks Commandment One. So, again, smoking is a sin. What you can do about that is never start smoking or, if you have been smoking, quit.

To learn more about the divine law, download or request your free copy of *The Ten Commandments*. For encouragement to help you stop smoking, read "Smoking and Health: The Often-Overlooked Key," Nov.-Dec. 2002, *The Good News*. This article is online at [www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn43/smoking.htm](http://www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn43/smoking.htm).



## Smoking is self-indulgent, slavishly self-destructive, neighbor-harming and, in all these respects, God-ignoring.

### Smoking is a god

*"But nicotine slaves are all the same,  
"At a pettin' party or a poker game,  
"Everything's gotta stop while they have another cigarette"*

—Lyrics from "Smoke, Smoke, Smoke That Cigarette"

Needing new and never-ending supplies of nicotine slaves to maintain their profits, tobacco companies specifically target teens and young adults as start-up smokers. But aside from that, why does that age group start smoking?

"My friends smoke." "I just wanted to try it." "I thought it was cool." "My parents smoke." One of the biggest reasons teens start to smoke is peer influence. Over 70 percent of Canadian teens say that having friends who smoke and/or peer pressure is the number one reason for starting to smoke ([www.lung.ca/protect-protegez/tobacco-tabagisme/facts-faits/teens-ados\\_e.php](http://www.lung.ca/protect-protegez/tobacco-tabagisme/facts-faits/teens-ados_e.php)).

Nicotine slaves feel guilty smoking alone; they want converts to make them feel comfortable. And wherever there is a

### A small defense of tobacco

Is there anything good about tobacco? Yes, indeed. There are some medicinal uses like poultices but the best thing about the weed is that it can defend other plants from insects. "A water/nicotine mixture has been used as an insecticide since 1746" (<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/nic.html>).

Tobacco is a bug spray! Why in the world would people want to smoke, chew or snuff bug spray?

God knew what He was doing. He didn't make tobacco products for food or drink. Their use certainly violates the principle of God's perfect and divine law. Sin will not enter the eternal, fabulous Kingdom of God. It's frightening to think that awesome, incredible, human potential could be completely missed because someone stubbornly insisted on continuing to inhale bug spray.

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**Randy Stiver** is the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Columbus and Cambridge, Ohio, and is a regular guest on the *Beyond Today* television program.

# Fitness or Fatness: What's Your Plan?

We generally take care of our cars, but most people don't have much of a plan for their health. With so much working against us, how can we choose fitness?

by Amanda Stiver

In your driveway sits the car of your dreams. You get in, start the engine, pull onto the road, scrape a tree, hit the curb, grind gears and leave the emergency brake on all the time. Worst of all, you fill your car with diesel fuel at the station instead of the gasoline it was designed to use.

Sound crazy? If you were willing to spend a great deal of money on a car, you would certainly protect your investment by treating the car with the greatest care. What about your body? It is the physical vessel that carries you through life. Do you treat it with as much care as you would a new car?

More often than not, we may neglect the needs of our physical bodies. We fuel them and exercise them inappropriately.

Here's the grim picture. The United States has long battled an obesity epidemic. Now other countries (including China) are also feeling the effects of excess. Eight percent of 10- to 12-year-olds in China's cities are obese and an extra 15 percent are overweight, while 18.8 percent of American children between 6 and 11 are overweight (Calum MacLeod, "Obesity of China's Kids Stun Officials," *USA Today*, Jan. 8, 2007).



## Merging into fitness

The great thing is that the human body is incredibly complex and renewable. It can repair itself—if we give it the right fuel and tools. So are we fit or are we fat? If we are fit, great! If we aren't—it's time to make a plan.

How much we weigh and how fit we are isn't determined by one meal or one day of jogging halfheartedly out to the mailbox and back. It takes years of bad habits to make a person unhealthy and gain excess weight. Reversing the process likewise takes a good chunk of time—to reinstitute good habits and see them through until they bear the fruit of a healthy body.

An optimistic attitude is a tool to long-term change. A daily habit of positive thinking can help keep us on track to make healthy food choices and fulfill our physical activity goals. Our thoughts are the foundation of our actions, but making the shift to upbeat thinking requires motivation. There are a lot of good reasons for becoming fit, and one of them shows up in the mirror every time we look in it.

Looking good is a confidence booster, especially when meeting your peers at school or in the workplace. It is a major motivation in today's society, but sometimes it overshadows a more important concept: that we take care of what God has given us.

God created the human body, and we are granted the use of one of these amazing creations for the duration of our physical lives. God designed some very specific fuel to feed human bodies. He gave spiritual and physical guidelines for right living that are recorded in the Bible. Treating God's creation with respect is a huge motivation to developing a fit body.

Being sick or just feeling bad in general can also be great motivators to turn around. The worse we feel, the less we are able to enjoy the life God intended us to have. Under these conditions, we all want to feel better. Sometimes circumstances out of our control dictate our health, but there are many things we can do to make a difference.

## Snooze, chew, move . . . repeat

Our daily habits have a huge impact on our overall health. They can determine how much weight we gain or lose, how well our muscles are developed, the state of our digestive system and our mental function.

An often overlooked but critical habit is sleep. Sleep is so essential that without it we would go crazy. It is the time when our bodies reconstruct and clean up to allow for growth and healing.

The endocrine system of hormone glands needs sleep in order to recover from the fast-paced, manic society in this digitized, computerized, overconnected world. Lack of sleep also interferes with the chemicals that tell our bodies when we are full.

The second important daily habit concerns what we put into our mouths. God is specific about the diet He planned for us. Rex Russell, M.D., in his book *What the Bible Says About Healthy Living: Three Biblical Principles That Will Change Your Diet and Improve Your Health*, developed three excellent principles of eating:

“1—Eat only substances God created for food. Avoid what is not designed for food.

“2—As much as possible, eat foods as they were created—before they are changed or converted into something humans think might be better. [In other words, avoid foods that have been overprocessed to the point that they have lost much of their nutritional value.]

“3—Avoid food addictions. Don’t let any food or drink become your god” (p. 29).

Good things to eat include eggs and clean meats listed in the Bible, fresh fruits and vegetables, unrefined grains and oils, nuts, pure dairy products with natural cultures and minimally processed sweeteners like honey, maple syrup or cane juice. Eat these foods in moderate amounts to satisfy hunger, but not to excess. Believe it or not, food can become an idol if we put it before obeying God’s commands to be moderate in all things and to treat the bodies He’s given us with respect (1 Corinthians 9:25).

The third crucial habit is physical activity. Exercise conditions the muscles in our bodies to work efficiently. It also keeps our internal organs fit and helps stabilize moods! There are thousands of types of exercise from speed walking to team sports. Exercises like calisthenics and weight training also develop greater strength. The most critical element of exercise is doing it on a regular basis.

Compel yourself to be physically active by making an appointment with a friend or family member to walk/jog/run/swim or do something several times a week. Or sign up and pay for an exercise class. You’ll be motivated to go so you won’t waste your money.

Above all, pick an activity you enjoy. If sumo wrestling isn’t your thing, you won’t be doing it often. Set a reasonable goal. Achieving it builds confidence along with increased fitness and keeps you focused.

## Plan and action

Getting support and direction for your plan to become fit will lead to success. When we want to be truly motivated to make changes in our physical health, we need to call on God. After all, He designed our bodies, so He knows how they work best. We can pray to Him for guidance to find the right resources.

Search for information. Glean it from books, friends and family, the Internet, professional nutrition counselors, athletic coaches and even school. Compile your information and be wise. Toss the ideas that sound goofy and keep the good stuff. Focus on the small changes you can make daily. Get enough sleep, eat the right food and get the best physical activity. Start small, pick three changes and stick to them. Maintain a positive attitude and seek God’s help to see you through.

Remember: It may take a while to get fit, but you can eventually turn your health around. You can look and feel better than ever before. Take care of your car *and* your body!



## Learn more online

How can you make food your friend and not your enemy? Visit our Web site, [VerticalThought.org](http://VerticalThought.org), to read “Fitness, Fatness and Food”—practical eating advice from a registered dietician.

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With a degree in history and art history from the Clark Honors College of the University of Oregon, **Amanda Stiver** lives near Columbus, Ohio, and works as a freelance writer.

# Who Really Killed Jesus?

Was it the Jews? Or a high priest? Or a Roman soldier? Or someone else?

by Ken Treybig

**In 2004, Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* reignited an age-old question about who was responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. Was it the Roman soldier who ran a spear into His side? Was it the Roman governor Pontius Pilate who authorized the crucifixion?**

Was it the Jewish religious leaders who incited the crowd to ask for His death? Was it the crowd itself? Was it the whole Jewish nation? Was it the high priest Caiaphas who declared Jesus worthy of death in a hasty predawn trial before the Jewish council? Was it Satan, working behind the scenes?

Each of these individuals and groups played a part in the death of Jesus of Nazareth, but were any of them fully responsible for His death? Before we answer too hastily, let's consider a few things.

## The Jews

Over the centuries, some have taken the statement in 1 Thessalonians 2:15 about the Jews killing the Lord Jesus as a condemnation of the whole nation. After all, the crowd did yell, "Crucify Him!" (Luke 23:21).

That acrimonious hatred has been used to justify many atrocities against those of Jewish descent, including the killing of Jews by Christians. Jews have been called "Christ-killers," and this hatred was used by Nazis as one of their justifications for the deaths of 6 million Jews in the Holocaust of World War II.

But we should remember that Jesus was a Jew and loved His people (Hebrews 7:14; Matthew 9:36). He healed many Jews during His ministry and was immensely popular among the Jewish people (Matthew 15:30; Luke 5:15). In fact, He was so popular that even though the religious leaders wanted to kill Him, they didn't want to take Him captive during the spring festival for fear of an uproar among the people (Matthew 26:3-5).

## The religious leaders

The Jewish religious leaders clearly bear some guilt. After all, they were looking for a way to take Jesus by deception and kill Him (Mark 14:1) and were quite happy to pay Judas to betray Jesus (Mark 14:10-11).

It is impossible for us to know at this point how much they were influenced by Satan, who was anxious to see Jesus killed, and how much came from their own envy and pride. They accused Jesus of all kinds of things (Mark 15:3) and stirred up the crowd to crucify Him and release a criminal named Barabbas (Mark 15:11). So even if they were not the ones to actually crucify Jesus, they pressured Pilate to do it.

## The Romans

That leads us to the Romans—the ones who actually did the scourging and crucifixion. Pontius Pilate stated repeatedly that he could find no legitimate reason to kill Jesus (Luke 23:13-15, 23-24). Yet he still gave in to the demands of the crowd and the chief priests and commanded Jesus to be scourged and crucified after "washing his hands" of the death of an innocent person (Matthew 27:24-26). The Roman soldiers tortured, mocked and crucified Jesus, eventually stabbing Him with a spear.

## The guilt spreads

A few weeks later, Peter spread the guilt for Christ's death around quite liberally when he said that "both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together" against Jesus (Acts 4:27). Peter implicates leaders along with Israelites and non-Israelites. That doesn't leave anyone out!

Peter said that all humanity is guilty of killing Jesus Christ. The apostle John did the same when he wrote that Jesus made payment for the sins of the *whole world* (1 John 2:2). Sadly, God realized it would be needful for a Savior to be sent to pay the penalty for the sins of humanity even before the start of human life (1 Peter 1:19-20).

So each of us—every human being who has ever lived or ever will live—is guilty of causing the death of Jesus Christ. In Romans 3 Paul lays out the case very clearly. He quotes David from Psalm 14 saying no human being is righteous

(Romans 3:10-18) and concludes that "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23).

That should make each of us a bit ashamed and uncomfortable, because even though we may not have been the one to literally cry out, "Crucify Him," and were not the ones to beat Him or run a spear in His side, our sins required His death. Each of us is therefore responsible for killing Jesus!

## The love of God

Yet ultimate responsibility rests with God the Father and Jesus Himself—as the sacrifice was determined in advance (see Isaiah 53:10). It is a witness to the incredible depth of God's love that He would decide, before He even created human beings, that a savior would be needed and determined to fill that need with His only Son (John 3:16). What incredible love it took for both the Father and Son to fulfill that plan in the setting of betrayal, abuse and crucifixion in the first century.

**Paul marveled at the deep expression of God's love to have Christ die for us while we were still sinners.**

Paul marveled at the deep expression of God's love to send His son Jesus Christ to die for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:7-8). Jesus Himself assured us of the depth of His love by saying no one forced Him to die. *He laid down His life on His own, in total agreement with the plan of the Father* (John 10:17-18).

How can we ever repay such expressions of immeasurable love? We can't. But Jesus tells us how we should respond. Three times in John 14, just before He was betrayed and crucified, He said if we love Him we should obey His commandments: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (verse 15), "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me" (verse 21), and "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word" (verse 23).

He stated this shortly after instituting the New Testament Passover in the previous chapter. It was the same annual feast described in the Old Testament, but with new symbols of washing feet and taking bread and wine to symbolize humility, His beaten body and shed blood.

If you'd like to learn more about the sacrifice of Jesus and the New Testament observance of Passover and all the feasts kept by Jesus Christ and the early New Testament Church, read online or request our free booklets *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, available online at [www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets).

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**Ken Treybig** is the director of United Youth Camp Carter and pastor of United Church of God congregations in East Texas.

## Emotions

Continued from page 7

whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Hate, by contrast, is a strong emotion that is developed by reaction to what is hurtful or painful. God reveals that sin is the transgression of His holy law. The wages, or result, of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sin also brings much pain into our lives. Knowing that there is cause and effect helps us make right decisions.

David says in the Psalms, "You who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart" (Psalm 97:10-11).

Notice the emotional state of those who are upright in heart. David describes it as gladness. Living a righteous life is a good way to counteract the negative emotions of distress, embarrassment, fear, apprehension, worry and anxiety.

Though unpleasant to experience, negative emotions can encourage us to make needed changes in our lives. We

all know stress is bad for us.

Today's neuroscientists have discovered that chronic stress actually causes physical damage to a part of our brain, the hippocampus, which is responsible for learning and memory ([www.trainers-direct.com/resources/articles/Wexler/PowerofEmotions.htm](http://www.trainers-direct.com/resources/articles/Wexler/PowerofEmotions.htm)). No wonder we have a hard time thinking properly when we are under stress!



### Godly emotions

Godly emotions are developed by studying God's purpose for living. He wants us to experience the "joy" of salvation (Psalm 51:12) and "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). When our great

God created this fabulous world, the angels "shouted for joy" (Job 38:7).

Satan is the god of this world, and he wants us to share his pain and torment. But if we want the joy and happiness that accompany a successful spiritual life, we need to understand God's purpose for our lives. God wants us to develop personal integrity through living by the golden rule: "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well" (James 2:8).

Emotions are marvelous. They make us feel alive and unique. Take the time to smell the roses and stare at a beautiful sunset, punctuated with golden toasted clouds that turn slowly into darkness. Hug a friend and whisper a prayer for those in need.

If you feel deeply, you will understand what Jesus felt when He looked at a people who were without guidance and quietly wept. We have much to live for and need to hone our emotional skills to become people with a real connection to a real God who wants us to be a part of His eternity.

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**Larry Greider** is the coordinator of United Youth Camps and Challenger II Programs. He also serves as a United Church of God pastor in Los Angeles, California.

# College Professor Discusses Differences in Christianity



Interview by Kristin Yarbrough

*Vertical Thought* recently interviewed Ronald Wroblewski, who has been an instructor at Spoon River College in Canton, Illinois, for the past 12 years. He teaches such courses as World Religions, Introduction to Philosophy, Ethics, and Logic and Critical Thinking.

Mr. Wroblewski earned a bachelor's degree in political science at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and a master's degree in health care administration from the University of St. Francis in Joliet, Illinois. He received a bachelor's degree in theology and a master's degree in religious studies from Ambassador College in Pasadena, California.

Mr. Wroblewski attends the Canton, Illinois, congregation of the United Church of God and is currently pursuing his Ph.D. from Bernelli University.

**Vertical Thought:** At the beginning of your World Religions course, you mention that there are thousands of different Christian churches. If they all trace their beliefs to the Bible, are they really all that different?

**Ron Wroblewski:** Yes. There are major differences in governance, how rituals are carried out and many other things. It also seems there is a different church for each variation of doctrine that has occurred during the centuries.

There are major differences between Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant churches, of course. Then you have the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists and the Church of God groups. And then there are Pentecostal churches, which are very different from traditional mainline churches like Lutherans and Methodists.

Jesus said that He didn't come to bring peace to the earth, but division. And that has definitely happened.

**VT:** When did all the differences first start to appear, and why did these Christians—whose name indicates that they are followers of Christ—deviate from what He and His disciples taught?

**RW:** As we know, differences were referred to in the letters of the New Testament. By the middle of the second century, several major doctrinal divisions were developing. For example, debate began on what happens after death. The controversy over whether human

beings have an immortal soul versus whether they are waiting to be resurrected is still with Christianity today.

My personal feelings are that since the early Church expected Christ to return quickly, hope of that was fading after two generations and people began to look for other explanations of what happens after death. When the hope of the early Church didn't come to pass, many people gave up on it.

**VT:** Where did the alternative ideas originate?

**RW:** It looks like the Gnostics were the first to attempt to combine portions

**Jesus said that He didn't come to bring peace to the earth, but division. And that has definitely happened.**

of Christianity with Greek philosophy. They rejected the resurrection of the body and replaced it with Plato's doctrine of the immortality of the soul. They believed the spirit is everything, the body nothing, and fell into moral licentiousness. Much of their time was spent learning the "correct" magic passwords that would enable the delivered soul to pass back to its heavenly home.

In the second century, [the Catholic theologian] Origen taught that souls might be eternal—preexisting birth and surviving death through reincarnation. He was very sympathetic to the Platonic doctrine of the soul as being akin to God but

obliged to live in a material world that is not its true home.

Another church father, Augustine, also attempted to combine Plato's ideas about the immortality of the soul with Christian teachings. Many of these doctrinal divisions came to a head in the fourth century when the Roman emperor Constantine forced them to be settled by the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325.

**VT:** How did the Roman emperor get involved in Christianity? Didn't the Romans persecute Christians?

**RW:** At first, many Christians were killed for refusing to worship the emperor. Later, Constantine saw Christianity as something that could bring unity to his far-flung empire. But to do so, the disputes that divided Christianity had to be resolved. He called for a meeting of all bishops at Nicaea [in what is now northwestern Turkey] in A.D. 325 to discuss these issues.

After heated debate at the Council of Nicaea, Constantine made several declarations, one of which established Sunday as the official day of worship. It is noteworthy that Constantine's stated motive

for introducing this custom was respect for the sun. He was not aware of any mutual exclusiveness between Christianity and his faith in the sun. The transition from solar monotheism (the most popular form of contemporary paganism) to Christianity was not difficult.

Constantine also decreed that Christians would observe Easter, and it would be forbidden to keep Passover. In fact, he stated that Christians were to stay away from anything that was "Jewish."

**VT:** Is that why other observances listed in the Bible, like Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost, disappeared from modern Christianity?

## From Our Readers...

### "Most resourceful literature"

Insightful articles, colorful presentation, lucidly clear writing. These are the hallmarks of *Vertical Thought* magazine. I think it's the most resourceful literature one could ever get on not only Christian living but also general everyday living. God bless the United Church of God and the staff of the magazine for impacting millions of lives around the world!

—Adebayo

### "Aid to survival"

Being a person with many friends, your magazine on friendship came as a valuable aid to survival. Thank you!

—Oliver

### "A very wonderful thing"

*Vertical Thought* magazine has been a very wonderful thing in

my life ever since I began reading it. In fact, all my friends have also become addicted to the magazine. Please keep it up. It is very biblical. God bless you.

—Kemi

### "Outstanding article"

I'd like to compliment Mike Bennett and thank him for his outstanding article, "The Loneliness Trap," in the fall issue of *VT*. I took important notes from it.

The section headings were very descriptive and accurate regarding the scourge of loneliness. Having experienced loneliness throughout my adult life, I learned much from the article and learned of some helpful resources.

I'll pass this *VT* issue on like I usually do, but will emphasize this article in particular.

I wish I had come across an

article like this much earlier in my life, for I could have avoided many of the pitfalls I fell into and dug for myself. It offered real, practical advice, which is what I didn't get from the numerous books and booklets I read from famous televangelists and other mainline Protestant preachers.

Basically they just kept saying that Jesus loves me and don't worry. It seemed like they couldn't face the fact that millions of people in America, and in the church, are desperately lonely. Thanks again for your efforts in helping the lonely.

—Kenneth

### "Interesting for many personalities"

The numerous articles on the *VT* Web site are very interesting for

many personalities. As I read the one on "Finding Your Niche in Life" to my son, age 11, I was very impressed at the variety of articles because, after reading that one (go Sean!), I felt urged to read more! WOW! What great reading you've put on the *Vertical Thought* Web site! A lot of work and time went into all this, so pass our thanks on to all of the writers.

—Diane

### "Helped me make some important decisions"

Thank you for making *Vertical Thought* magazine available to me in Nigeria. It has really been a source of help. It is educational and has helped me make some important decisions in my life.

—Elejogun

**RW:** Yes. The Romans turned to persecuting all things Jewish, and Christians often had to decide whether to hold what appeared to be Jewish beliefs and likely suffer persecution or to worship on different dates and avoid that persecution.

Easter definitely replaced Passover. Wiccans claim Christians stole Easter from them. One text I use in class, Phyllis Currott's *Book of Shadows*, explains that the name *Easter* comes from the name of the German fertility goddess Eostre. Eggs and rabbits—commonly associated with the holiday—are symbols of fertility.

The Catholic Church timed Easter to coincide with the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox, another remnant of the old (pagan) religion just below the surface of the new.

**VT:** Did this happen with other modern Christian holidays?

**RW:** Other holidays were adopted to add numbers to the church without requiring people to give up their cherished practices. There are letters between bishops that discuss ways to convert pagans. The answer was to attempt to eliminate the worst of the practices and put the others under the umbrella of Christianity. They simply

changed the name of who was being worshipped. Christmas, originally the birthday of the sun god, became the day to worship the Son of God.

**VT:** So did the controversy stop after the Council of Nicaea?

**RW:** No. The [Catholic] church split in A.D. 1054 into the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Eastern Orthodox Church in the East. Some of the issues that led to this split included the pope's authority, the use of statues in worship versus the use of icons and whether priests would be allowed to marry.

A second major split—known as the Protestant Reformation—happened in the 16th century. There had been growing dissatisfaction with some of the church's teachings and in 1517 Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses to stimulate discussion on several of these issues, such as the belief in purgatory, the sale of indulgences [buying one's or another's way out of purgatory] and confession to priests. Ultimately, this led to the start of the Lutheran Church.

King Henry VIII of England also broke away from the Catholic Church to establish the Anglican Church. Still other issues led to further splits within the

Christian community. Some of those include transubstantiation (whether the bread and wine become Christ's actual body and blood or whether they are just symbols) and whether works (good deeds) were necessary for salvation. Others debate what happens to people when they die, at what age one must be baptized and whether immersion in water is necessary for baptism or whether sprinkling is sufficient.

**VT:** Which doctrinal shift do you think changed Christianity most?

**RW:** The Council of Nicaea was definitely a major shifting point, with the settling of the controversial questions. The Protestant Reformation was another major turning point. But the Protestants, while eliminating several of the serious abuses of the Catholic Church, didn't go far enough in restoring the original faith of the first-century Church.

**Editor's note:** If you'd like to learn more about the original Christianity taught by Jesus and practiced by the first-century Church, request our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.

**Kristin Yarbrough** works at the Home Shopping Network as a copywriter. She and her husband Sean live in Brandon, Florida.

# A Pentecost Message: It's *Your* Church Too!

Did you realize that this biblical Holy Day has special significance for young people?

by Tom Clark

**W**hen I was a small boy, I would sometimes get up early Sunday morning, sneak into my parents' bedroom and turn off their alarm clock so they would oversleep. You see, my family didn't know about the seventh-day Sabbath. We went to church on Sunday; thus the alarm would be set for that morning so the family could get up and go. My plan was that if the alarm didn't go off, they would oversleep and, by the time they woke up, it would be too late to make it to church.

Obviously, church was not something I looked forward to. And amazingly, my little ploy worked on numerous occasions! (Let's keep that secret between us, okay?)

At that young age, going to church was not important to me. Looking back on those experiences now, I realize that it was because what happened at church had little or no impact on the rest of my life. And it seems that my experience was not unique.

According to a 2003 survey by the Barna Research Group, most children

## Do you view religion, faith and church as just something for your parents, with no bearing on the choices you make in life?

who were brought up attending a church had a similar experience. "For most teenagers who have spent years attending church activities, their faith is not integrated into who they are and how they live. Most of the young people who claim they developed an understanding of the Bible . . . show no evidence of using that understanding in relation to the core beliefs and lifestyle choices that we studied" ([www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=143](http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=143)).

In other words, these young people did not take ownership in the church. They did not see that religion, faith and church had any real relevance to the rest of their lives. It wasn't *their* church. It was their parents' church.

Does this sound familiar to you? Do you view religion, faith and church as just something for your parents? Do you feel the principles taught at church have no

real bearing on the choices you make in life? It doesn't have to be this way!

### Dramatic beginning

In the year Jesus Christ was crucified, the Feast of Pentecost came with some rather dramatic events. First there came a sound like the roaring of a tornado. Then it looked like each of the disciples had fire dancing on his head. They were each filled with God's Spirit, and by God's power they were able to preach to the people so that every man understood what was said in his own native language (Acts 2:1-12).

The Church of God had begun. Jesus promised that His Church would always exist (Matthew 16:18) and that He would always be working with His people to fulfill the will of God the Father.

### A special promise

On the first Pentecost for the Church of God, Peter said something of tremendous importance: "For the promise is to you *and to your children*, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39, emphasis added).

What promise? The promise of God's Church and His leadership in it, the promise that with maturity and repentance, the people of God can be baptized and receive His Holy Spirit. This promise is to the adults *and* to their children. The Church of God isn't to be just your parents' Church. God wants it to be *your* Church too!

When Paul wrote to the Church members

in Corinth, he noted that the children of God's people are "holy" (1 Corinthians 7:14). To be "holy" means to be set apart or separated for a special purpose. To the Jewish people, this came through the covenant God made with Abraham and Abraham's descendants. To the Church, this means accepting the offer to have a special, close relationship with our Creator. In both cases young people are included!

So the door is open to young people too. Yet you have to decide whether or not you will accept and act on the opportunity God has given you. Will you make the Church of God *your* Church? Will you listen to and learn the biblical principles taught at church services and use those principles to guide the choices you make in your life? Will you respond to this priceless opportunity?

Responding to God's offer means making the values and teachings of His Church your values. It means using those values to guide your decisions regarding the use of drugs and alcohol, sexual relations, music and entertainment, romantic relationships, how you dress and even how you manage your finances. It means you make the words of your Creator the guiding principles for everything you do.

When I was a small boy sneaking in to turn off the alarm clock on Sunday mornings, I didn't know about the Feast of Pentecost, much less understand it. I certainly didn't know there was an opportunity offered to me. If you want to find out more about the meaning of Pentecost and the promises God makes to you, request your free copy of *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* ([www.ucg.org/booklets/HD/](http://www.ucg.org/booklets/HD/)). The Creator never intended that His Church be just for your parents. He wants it to be *your* Church too!

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**Tom Clark** is a husband and father and the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Liberal, Salina and Wichita, Kansas.

**T**he Louisville Winter Family Weekend is well-known among United Church of God teens for its wide variety of activities. Young people who attend often play sports such as basketball, volleyball and football. There are also seminars to attend and dances and other social events for meeting others. The variety of things to do is amazing.

Never in a million years would I have guessed that Dumpster diving would become one such activity for me.

And yet, there I was, hurriedly digging through the Dumpster behind the Clarion Hotel. I suppose such a scene requires a bit of an explanation, so here goes:

I like to draw. I've been drawing for as long as I can remember, though it wasn't until recently that I've gotten any good at it. At any rate, I have this binder where I put all the drawings I'm really proud of—a portfolio, I guess you could call it.

### Lost forever?

I took this binder to Louisville, Kentucky, for the annual winter weekend and made the mistake of forgetting it at the Family Fun Fair. The next day, after realizing it was missing, I started frantically searching for it, but had no luck. It held five years' worth of my artistic work, and, despite my prayers, I was sure that I'd lost it forever.

Thankfully, my story doesn't end there. One of my friends had the bright idea of actually asking the hotel staff if they'd seen my binder, and it quickly became "good news, bad news" time. The good news? They definitely remembered seeing a black binder. The bad news? They definitely remembered throwing that binder into the trash.

So with my binder currently making its residence in our hotel's Dumpster, I set out with a band of friends to retrieve it. It was by no means an easy task. The binder had been thrown out early that morning, and it was now mid-afternoon. I'll spare you the details, but suffice it to say it was one of the grossest undertakings I'd ever been involved in.

Truth be told, I almost gave up. Were it not for the resolve of a friend who was busy

digging in the Dumpster beside me, I would have stopped. But his determination kept me going, and together we diligently rooted through trash bag after trash bag until we finally came to the one that held my binder. Without his help, I seriously doubt that I would have gotten it back—so if you're reading this, thanks again and I owe you one.

### A miracle!

Anyway, right after we found it, a few more of my friends came around the corner and told us they'd been praying that we'd find it. It was then that I realized we'd all just witnessed a miracle—at least it was to me. God had answered my prayer, albeit not at all like I had thought He would.

***I realized we'd all just witnessed a miracle. God had answered my prayer!***

There are plenty of lessons to learn from this story—the importance of friends, the power of prayer, the necessity of faith and patience—but I'd like to focus on just one aspect: the nature of miracles.

*Continued on page 21*



It was one of the most unlikely places for a miracle to occur. Prayer and persistence paid off.

by Jeremy Lallier

# A Moral Dilemma?

A radio program portrayed it as one. But in the end...

by Natalie McQueen

Every now and then I listen to a radio program here in Australia that features a segment called “Moral Dilemma.” A listener calls or writes to the station and explains the difficult situation he or she is in, and other listeners contact the station with advice on what the person should do.

In yesterday’s dilemma, “John” explained that he had bought a base model BMW, made several modifications to it that gave it the appearance of a much more luxurious model, and then traded it in. The car dealer had evidently not inspected the car very closely, and offered him \$90,000. John knew its value was more like \$30,000, and wondered what he should do.

The two announcers, Tracey and Tim, discussed John’s dilemma together first.

“Ooooh,” said Tim. “This is a verrrrrrrry tricky one.”

“It is not,” Tracey retorted. “It’s cut-and-dried. He can’t take the money.”

“But—” said Tim.

“But what? You’ve got to be honest with yourself, and you’ve got to be able to live with yourself.”

“But come on, Trace,” Tim countered. “Used car dealers. Everyone knows what they’re like.”

“That doesn’t matter,” said Tracey. “What goes around comes around. It’s the law of karma.”

“But how do you know that this isn’t the car dealer’s bad karma coming back to get *him*?”

Tracey and Tim then asked their listeners to call or SMS [i.e., text message] the station with their views on what John should do. About 80 percent thought he should take advantage of the car dealer’s mistake, usually on the basis that doing something dishonest to a dishonest person was okay. This included an ex-used car dealer who vouched for the corruption of the industry and strongly advised John to “take the money and run.”

## What would you do?

What would *you* say John should have done? More importantly, what would you do if you were given the opportunity to make an easy but dishonest \$60,000? And forget karma. What would *God* say about the situation?

Perhaps you think that this is such an unlikely thing to ever happen to you that you don’t really have to make a decision about it. If that’s the case, try applying the dilemma to a situation that you *could* face.

What if one of your teachers forgot to record the *D+* you got for your last project in her book? If she asked you to remind her of your mark [or grade],

**The principle applies to everyone and forces us to be honest in *all* our dealings with people, business or not. It’s not a matter of just answering a question honestly. It’s a matter of behaving truthfully to begin with.**

would you say you got an *A*? Would it make a difference if she was the grumpiest, bossiest or strictest teacher in the school?

Or what if you got more change than you should have when you bought something at the milk bar [Australian for convenience store]? Would you tell the guy at the counter? Would it make a difference if you knew he had ripped off a friend of yours last week?

## What God says

God has plenty to say about honesty in His Word. One of the most obvious and well-known things in this respect is the Ninth Commandment: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16). Although the language of this commandment applies to a court setting, the principle is clear: Do not lie.

Elsewhere God gives a list of seven things He *hates* and describes as

*abominations*. Two of the seven things are related to dishonesty—“a lying tongue” and “a false witness who speaks lies” (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Okay, so you know the lying thing is bad. You can’t tell someone something that simply isn’t true. So in that situation with your teacher, you’d have to tell her you got a *D+*. But what about the milk bar guy? He just offered you the change. No questions asked, no answers needed, right?

Have a look at Leviticus 19:35-36. “Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight, or volume. Your scales and weights must be accurate. Your containers for measuring dry goods or liquids must be accurate” (New Living Translation).

Or how about Deuteronomy 25:13-16?

“You must use accurate scales when you weigh out merchandise, and you must use full and honest measures . . . Those who cheat with dishonest weights and measures are detestable to the LORD your God” (NLT).

These instructions were given specifically to salespeople, to warn them against cheating customers by using inaccurate weights and measurements. (Think of it this way: Imagine buying a can of soft drink, and cracking it open to find it half full of soft drink and half full of sand.)

However, the principle applies to everyone and forces us to be honest in *all* our dealings with people, business or not. It’s not a matter of just answering a question honestly. It’s a matter of behaving truthfully to begin with. Salespeople are expected to, and so are we.

## Cheating a cheater?

But what if the person you’re cheating

deserves it? Let's go back to Tim's argument about John and the BMW trade-in. Tim reckoned that John should take advantage of the car dealer because, as everyone apparently knows, car dealers are famous for ripping the customers off big-time. Why should John do the dealer a favor and miss out on \$60,000 as a result?

Or what if your teacher likes to randomly move people from their seats when it's always somebody else doing the talking? Or what if the milk bar guy has a reputation for selling Mars Bars past their use-by date? Isn't it only fair that they should get back what they've given out to others?

In order for this argument to stack up, you'd have to find biblical evidence for it—which you won't. In the meantime, let me give you some biblical evidence *against* it.

Matthew 7:12 says, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." Read this verse carefully. It is a scripture about *your* behavior, not the behavior of others. It does *not* mean you can do to them what they've done to you!

Romans 12:19 adds, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." In other words, it is not your place to give someone what's coming to them. It's God's, and only God's.

Next consider 1 Peter 3:8-9: "Finally, all of you be of one mind . . . not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing." Instead of doing the dodgy on a dodgy person [Australian slang for cheating a cheater—repaying wrong with wrong] you're expected to do something good for him or her.

Finally, the book of Proverbs has a bit to say about the dangers of using human reasoning to justify our actions. There is nothing in the Bible to suggest we should pay back people who cheat us or others. To say it's okay to do so because they are cheats themselves is just using human reasoning.

Read Proverbs 3:5 and 14:12. The first says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding." The second says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." So we must very carefully consider why we do the things we do. If the reasons for our actions are contrary to Scripture, we are standing in dangerous territory!

God expects everyone to be honest with others, regardless of how honest those others are themselves. So John's dilemma really wasn't a dilemma at all. Even though Tracey's understanding of "karma" wasn't right either, she was at least correct about the issue being cut-and-dried. There was no way John could justify taking that \$60,000.

And similarly, you also have a moral responsibility to be honest in your dealings with people on a day-to-day basis, even if it means "missing out" on a great deal.

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**Natalie McQueen** lives in Melbourne, Australia, and attends the Melbourne East congregation of the United Church of God. She is a qualified high school teacher and also attended Ambassador Bible Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, with her husband Craig in 2003.

## Miracle

Continued from page 19

I get the feeling that many of us may have too narrow a view regarding miracles. We often expect them to be big and glamorous displays. We expect seas to part (Exodus 14:21), mountains to move (Matthew 17:20) or the sun to stop (Joshua 10:12-14). While these are all certainly miracles, they are not the only kind.

### A still, small voice

God doesn't always work in huge miracles. He also makes Himself known in tiny, almost unnoticeable things. Consider the story of how God chose to appear to Elijah the prophet:

"Then He said, 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.' And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave" (1 Kings 19:11-13).

**Many miracles simply involve the "still small voice" that we may hear every day if we listen close enough.**

God was not in any of the three mighty demonstrations of nature's power. He didn't choose to present Himself in some extravagant display. Instead, He was in the "still small voice" that Elijah heard.

Not every miracle involves a great wind, earthquake or fire. Many simply involve the "still small voice" that we may hear every day if we listen close enough. We may hear it in the kindness of a stranger, in the one thing that finally goes right during a particularly bad day, in the few bright rays of sunshine cast into our lives by a good friend, in meditating on God's Word or even in the depressing depths of a hotel Dumpster.

So be on the lookout for God's "still small voice" in your life. Remember, He is watching out for you and me, and He is always there if we are willing to look.

As King David put it: "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:7-10). There is no place we can go that God cannot work miracles in our lives.

Not even Dumpsters.

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**Jeremy Lallier** is 17 years old and attends the United Church of God congregation in Worcester, Massachusetts.



# IN THE NEWS

Compiled by Amanda Stiver

## Comedy Cleans Up

Comedians and the crowds they play to are looking for cleaner acts. A poll by Zogby International released on Nov. 30, 2006, found that 72 percent of those polled wanted television programming to have positive, anti promiscuity and antiviolence messages.



Longtime comic Auggie Cook advises young comedians: "What I tell a lot of guys is you can always make a clean act dirty. If you have only a dirty act, you're limited in the places you can work."

The shift to cleaner comedy comes at a time when the latest in movie and television comedies such as *Borat*, *Jackass II* and *South Park* feature crass, offensive humor (Timothy McNulty, "'Edgy' Losing Its Luster; Clean Acts Gain Popularity," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Dec. 27, 2006).

Clean humor is uplifting and rejuvenating, while offensive and perverse humor is destructive and often immoral. The new trend toward positive humor may provide young people of God with a greater choice of viewing material.

## Coaches Play It Cool

At high school basketball games in Grove City, Ohio, the coaches have set an example of calm, positive sportsmanship to their players. Their cue? All coaches wear a pair of sneakers and casual dress to games, not out of disrespect, but "as a reminder to stay relaxed and patient on the sideline with the players, fans and officials. There's no cussing by anyone. There's no screaming. We think that relaxes our kids and just lets them play," said Coach Greg Waits.

Their concept has created success, and they are having an excellent season (Mark Znidar, "With Grove City, It's Not Just the Shoes," *The Columbus Dispatch*, Dec. 22, 2006). Sports provide an outlet for positive competition but can easily spiral out of control if attitudes are not kept in check.

## Drowning in Spam

The technological world is facing a mess made out of spam. Spam volumes have doubled from the past year, according to Ironport, a firm that filters spam. They find that unsolicited junk mail accounts for more than 9 of every 10 e-mail messages sent on the Internet.

What is spam? Besides a canned meat product, spam is the unofficial term for unsolicited e-mails that advertise such things as fake miracle drugs, pornographic Web sites and worthless stocks and financial ploys. Spammers make money off gullible people and are what used to be called *con artists*—people who promise something for practically nothing. Instead of

street corners, they use e-mail to sell their wares.

For the past few years spammers have stayed one step ahead of the anti-spam technicians. Using viruses to steal computer access and text that is encoded in images, junk mail designers fool the anti-spam technology that is limited to sifting out unwanted e-mails by recognizing similarities in text only (Brad Stone, "Spam Doubles, Finding New Ways to Deliver Itself," *The New York Times*, Dec. 6, 2006).

What to do? Simplify your technological life and try to accept e-mail only from those you know and who are in your address book. Keep track of Web sites that send messages to you and don't open the ones you don't recognize; delete them. There are many spam-blocking programs available and technology experts to advise you on which to purchase. Take advantage of them and try to remain spam-free.

## IM Crazy

A recent online survey found that 48 percent of teens (13 to 18 years old) use instant messaging—more than twice the percentage of adults who use it. Nearly three fourths of adults who use instant messaging still use e-mail communication more often, while three fourths of teens send instant mes-



sages more than e-mail. Also, 22 percent of teens use instant messaging to ask for or accept a date, and 16 percent use it to break up a romantic relationship.

Some teens keep multiple instant message conversations going simultaneously. But Naomi Baron, a linguistics professor at American University suggests, "If you have 15 conversations going simultaneously, sometimes

you're just throwing things out there and then dashing off to the next customer." That's a habit that can result in hurt feelings and gossip ("Survey Finds Huge Instant-Messaging Generation Gap," Associated Press, Dec. 7, 2006).

Technology has advantages and disadvantages, and it changes frequently, but there is still no replacement for face-to-face human contact or the thoughtfulness of a handwritten note or a phone call. Moderation is the key.

## Technological Manners

With new technological products rapidly appearing, it's important to remember that polite manners are still important. Thelma Domenici, an etiquette columnist, gives some suggestions to counter possible rudeness:

- iPods are fun, but they shouldn't isolate you from other people. If someone asks you a direct question, remove the ear buds.
- Every e-mail and text message you send also sends a message about you. Use good grammar; be kind and clear.
- If you're in a face-to-face conversation, the person present takes precedence over a cell phone call. That's what voice mail is for.
- Last, but not least, cell phone conversations in public places

should never make other people uncomfortable or affect your ability to drive. If either of these applies, end the call and talk later ("Technology Requires Old-School Manners," *Scripps Howard News Service*, Jan. 25, 2007).

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## Material Generation

A 2006 survey done by the University of California, Los Angeles, finds that almost 75 percent of its freshman class believed that it was essential to be financially wealthy. The same survey from 1980 indicated that only 62.5 percent thought wealth was all important and in 1966 less than half, a mere 42 percent, felt the same way. A poll by the Pew Research Center found that 80 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds think getting rich is a top goal for their generation.

David Walsh, a psychologist heading the National Institute on Media and the Family in Minneapolis, Minnesota, says, "Our kids have absorbed the cultural values of more, easy, fast and fun" (Martha Irvine, "Money-Hungry U.S. Youths Becoming Generation \$, Polls Find," *Associated Press*, Jan. 24, 2007).

Being financially secure is important, but becoming fixated on personal wealth can lead to serious problems. It can even put a wedge in your personal relationship with God. Learn to be prudent with money, but stay balanced. For more information request or download *Managing Your Finances* ([www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets)).

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## Accentuate-the-Positive Psychology

The discipline of positive psychology is studying the meaning of happiness and well-being. Classes on this subject are increasingly found on college campuses in the United States and the United Kingdom. Grammar schools are looking for ways to add positive messages to their class curricula. Even the government of Scotland wants to see if positive psychology and a new parliament can create the next Enlightenment for its citizens. Proponents of the subject want to know if happiness can be learned and, in turn, taught.

Positive psychologists use practical techniques to create happiness. They recommend people tally up the good things that happen during the day and show gratitude to those who have been helpful to them.

But being grateful is nothing new. In the Psalms of the Bible, King David of Israel composed and compiled a great quantity of songs and poems thanking God for His blessings. The followers of Christ were often admonished to rejoice and give thanks. God's plan for mankind is the ultimate in positive psychology and happy endings—everyone has a part to play in it. For more information request or download *What Is Your Destiny?* ([www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets)).

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## Teen Sex, Drugs Lead to Depression

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill researchers reviewing data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health have found conclusive evidence that teenagers who engage in risky sexual and drug behavior will have an increased likelihood

of depression. But depression itself does not cause teenagers to indulge in those behaviors.

According to this research, statistics from 2003 help to explain why teen depression has increased: 47 percent of high school students reported that during the past month they had had intercourse, 45 percent had been drinking alcohol and 22 percent had used marijuana (Janice Shaw Crouse, "Teen Sex Leads to Depression and Drug Use," [www.cwfa.org](http://www.cwfa.org), Jan. 30, 2007). On the positive side, these statistics have dropped recently.

These studies counteract the myth that casual sex has no impact on emotional health. God gave a clear commandment against adultery in the Bible. As the evidence shows, abstaining from sexual activity until marriage results in more stable mental and emotional health. For more information request or download *The Ten Commandments* ([www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets)).

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## Early Hebrew Inscriptions on Egyptian Walls

Richard Steiner, a professor of Semitic languages at Yeshiva University in New York, has deciphered an ancient inscription found in a chamber under a pyramid south of Cairo. The inscription, which uses Egyptian characters to represent early Canaanite or proto-Hebraic speech, had been undeciphered by Egyptologists for nearly a century. Steiner dates the script to a period from the 30th to 25th centuries B.C. because of its similarities to a Semitic text used by Canaanites at the same time ("Egyptian Tomb Inscription May Bear Oldest Proto-Hebrew Text Yet," *Associated Press*, Jan. 25, 2007).

The inscription is a magic incantation to protect the sarcophagus from a snake invasion. It shows the cultural connections between the inhabitants of Canaan at the time and the Egyptians. The translated Semitic is an archaic example of what later developed into the Phoenician and Hebrew languages.

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## Mushrooms Have Triumphed!

The fungi are healthy! Medical researchers have turned their attention to the humble mushroom and have gathered a crop of health benefits. Consumption of a variety of fungi may help the immune system fight infections and may protect the body against diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. Mushrooms provide B vitamins and the minerals selenium, potassium and copper.



Fungi growers are even trying to add vitamin D to that list of nutrients by exposing just-picked mushrooms to ultraviolet light. Mushrooms also contain antioxidants (portobello and cremini varieties having the highest content) and beta glucans, the kind of healthy fiber also found in oatmeal (Janet Helm, "Healthful Mushrooms Emerge From the Dark," *The Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 18, 2006).

Penicillin, one of the most famous medical compounds, came from a fungus. So fungi have been working hard for human beings for a long time. Of course, not all mushrooms are edible. But there's another great reason for eating the ones that are—when prepared well, they can taste great!

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