

MEN OF VALOR

Empathy Deficit Disorder

IN THE NEWS

July—September 2011

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a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's leaders

GOD'S GOT A

PLAN

HOLY  
BIBLE

**What's Shakin'  
Terra Firma?**

Take a Vacation  
From the World

**What Does it Take to  
Be a "Real Man"?**

***Fairy-Tale Weddings:  
What's for Real?***

Five Qualities of  
Successful Students

**Lingua Franca:  
A Lesson in Language**

## The Supernatural and Disasters

**V**ampires, werewolves, wizards, shape-shifters—why are people so fascinated with these characters? Are they just flights of fancy or something more sinister? It turns out that they are, in fact, front men for the biggest supernatural “wannabe” in history!

Not surprisingly, in a recent interview in the Children’s Books section of About.com, Kim Patton, president of the Young Adult Library Services Association in America, described the continuing trend in 2011 of teen fascination with supernatural themes and vampires, ghosts and zombies. Maybe you’ve been overly transfixed with those subjects too. If so, then you might like to know that they’re all supernatural counterfeits!

There’s a tell-all book, high on the *Vertical Thought* recommended reading list, that reveals a great deal about actual supernatural beings. It contains amazing true stories about real angels and demons. The latter, by the way, were once holy angels, who rebelled and are now fallen angels called demons. They’re *not* friendly. And their leader—the supernatural wannabe himself—bears the title of Devil, which means “accuser” or “slanderer.” He’s got other names too, none of them good.

This terrific book is principally concerned, however, with the ultimate *good guys*—the supernatural divine Beings. It reveals the God family, comprising God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Plus the book recounts all sorts of adventures of people like you and me who directly communicated and interacted (sometimes well, sometimes badly) with these great, divine Supernaturals.

That interaction is going on at this very moment. And this book—the Holy Bible—tells us how we *should* interact, revealing the divinely directed way of living based on love for God and love for neighbor. Unfortunately, most of humankind have ignored or outright rejected this way of living, tuned themselves into the evil way of the supernatural wannabe Devil

and are now, as a global civilization, beginning to suffer a new and frightful round of consequences.

Those supernatural consequences include the recent natural disasters that have befallen the planet. With recent droughts in China, Australia, southern Africa, Texas and elsewhere, combined with too much rain in parts of Europe and North America plus the most devastating tornados in the U.S. in many decades, mankind is hurting. This comes on the heels of the devastation in Japan. Ocean waves are beautiful, but a massive tsunami is not. When the crust of the earth

**Unfortunately, most of humankind have ignored or outright rejected God’s way of living and are now beginning to suffer a new and frightful round of consequences.**

is calm we don’t often think about it, yet how terrified we become when it shakes and quakes!

Take some time to muse on this issue of VT. With the topic of earthquakes in mind, consider the creative power of the God’s supernatural forces at work around us today as you read “What’s Shakin’ Terra Firma?” by Mario Seigle.

And please realize that as a *Vertical Thought* reader, you’re already involved with the supreme good guys and their divine supernatural power that created and sustains the universe. In fact, as another of this issue’s articles explains, God has a plan, and you’re a part of it. Keep thinking vertically!



*Vertical Thought* is a biblically based magazine of understanding for young people aged 12-22. Our name 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. © 2011 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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# Contents

6

**4 God's Got a Plan**  
God plans to raise human beings out of our problems and lead us to an incredible destiny.

**6 What's Shakin' Terra Firma?**  
Why do we live in a world of earthquakes—and will we always?

**8 Take a Vacation From the World**  
Enjoy spiritually oriented time at God's Feast and summer camp.

**10 Men of Valor: King David & Winston Churchill**  
The Bible and more recent history offer lessons of courageous and wise leadership.

## Features

**2 Vantage Point**

**22 In the News**

**12 Five Qualities of Successful Students**  
Feeling behind where you ought to be in school? Time to take action!

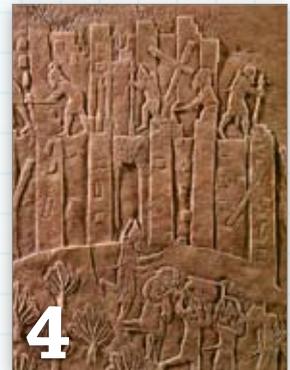
**14 Lingua Franca: A Lesson in Language**  
Learning another language helps to build bridges across cultures.

**16 Fairy-Tale Weddings: What's for Real?**  
Reality check, yes. Still, anticipate—and prepare.

**17 Me, Us, Them**  
Perspective changes through wife- and motherhood.

**18 What Does It Take to Be a Real Man?**  
What's a "real" man? How can you be one?

**20 Battling Empathy Deficit Disorder**  
Empathy for others is waning. Why? What should our focus be?



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# GOD'S GOT A

# PLAN

HOLY  
BIBLE

At 15, I realized that human society had long been heading cluelessly to its demise. But I also learned then that God has a great plan to raise human beings out of our problems and lead us to an incredible destiny.

by Randy Stiver

**I**t was the year that our family moved from the Pacific Northwest back to the farm near the Black Hills of South Dakota. I turned 15 that summer—close to the current median age of *Vertical Thought* readers. The drug and sexual revolution was raging, epitomized by “Hippie” culture. Drunken—or drug-induced—irresponsibility combined with militant immorality. What a destructive combination!

The nuclear Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union had heated up then. That was also the summer in which surrounding nations attacked the state of Israel and were defeated in less than a week. While driving our pickup truck from the ranch house to the hayfield that day in June, I remember hearing on the radio the news that the Six-Day War had ended. But that Middle Eastern conflict—which was, among other things, about the control of Jerusalem—spawned phenomenal

international tensions within the context of the Cold War.

I realized that summer that the educators and business, political and military leaders of all the nations have no idea about how to bring world peace. It dawned on me that the main way man found peace was to win a war. But then there would always be another war, usually worse than the one before. As a *Star Wars* character once said, “There’s always a bigger fish.”

At 15, I also understood that, from the Garden of Eden forward, human beings have lived without a plan that would solve the personal and societal problems of dishonesty, sexual immorality, greed, hatred and lust for power. But here’s the good part: That was also the year I clearly realized although humanity hasn’t got a clue, *God’s got a plan!*

## Man’s sad history will end when God intervenes

Our world is in a terrible fix. During the several thousand

During the several thousand years human beings have existed, we've managed to destroy every civilization we've built.



▲ 647 B.C.: Assyrians attack, dismantle and burn the Elamite city of Susa.

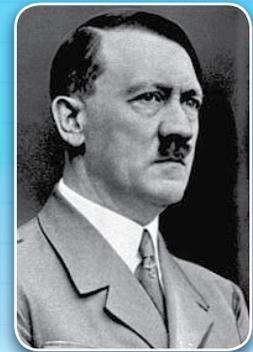
1200s: Mongols under Genghis Khan destroyed several civilizations across Asia.



▼ 149 B.C.: Rome destroyed the Carthaginian civilization at the end of the Third Punic War.



▼ 1915: Ottoman Turks attempt to destroy all Armenians in their empire, as well as Greeks, Assyrians and other non-Turks.



◀ 1940s: Adolf Hitler and the Nazis sought the complete destruction of all Jews, as well as Romanians (Gypsies) and others.



◀ 1988: Saddam Hussein attacks Kurdish villages with poison gas.

◀ 1500s: Spanish Conquistadors wipe out several civilizations in the New World through war and disease.

years human beings have existed, we've managed to destroy every civilization we've built. At best we can unite as small groups or as nations for a while. Then somebody gets selfish, starts a war and *pow, zap, boom*—it all falls down!

The direct purpose of militaries, it's been accurately assessed, is to kill people and break things. Nations thereby defend themselves because they can't trust their neighbors. They invent bigger, more terrible weapons to match the big, terrible weapons of other nations!

A chilling thought: So many of the amazing electronic gadgets we use daily in our 21st-century lives are spin-offs of weapons technology in one way or another. Via the "bigger fish" mentality, with their modern nuclear and biochemical land- and space-based weaponry nations can kill each other and everybody else in new and improved ways that didn't exist a few short decades ago. Result: tragedy.

Jesus Christ forewarned that a time of unprecedented trouble would come at the end of this age: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21).

But He also revealed God's grand plan and ultimate solution: divine intervention. "If these days of trouble were left to run their course, nobody would make it. But on account of God's chosen people, the trouble will be cut short" (verse 22, The Message). Tough times now, but peace looms on the horizon.

### Start at the beginning

What is the purpose of life? Why are we here? Where did we as the human race come from—and where are we going? These are big questions that need answers.

The Bible informs us in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the

Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." God we know as God the Father. The Word we know as Jesus Christ (see verse 14), who is also God along with the Father, being another member of the divine family, the ultimate sense of what the Bible calls the Kingdom of God. Long before His human birth Jesus acted on the Father's behalf as the Lord God of the Old Testament who actually created Adam and Eve (the first two human beings), led Israel out of Egypt at the Exodus and spoke through the biblical prophets.

The reference to the "beginning" in John 1:1 was a way of describing supernatural eternity into the past. The beginning of the physical universe—including mankind—came later. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," Genesis 1:1 tells us. Before this beginning there was nothing physical. In the course of time, God created humanity and the world as we know it today.

### Why create others?

God and the Word always existed. If we think about that statement long enough it makes us dizzy—because our tiny, finite minds can't fully comprehend even eternity into the future, let alone envision the eternal past. But why did God make us *now* (give or take a few thousand years)?

Consider this parallel on the human level. Why do thinking husbands and wives want to have children? They want to give life to others—their children—and to love them, sharing the joy of life with them. God did likewise. That's why He built that longing into the divine institution of marriage.

God and Christ presently constitute the God Kingdom family, named God after the Father: "For this reason I bow my knees

Continued on page 21

A model of the earth, showing the oceans drained and continents in green. The fiery orange lines and globs depict the fractured edges of the tectonic plates under the ocean.



# WHAT'S SHAKIN' TERRA FIRMA?

*When the ground beneath your feet begins to tremble, it can be terribly unsettling, especially with lives in jeopardy. Why do we live in a world of earthquakes—and will we always?*

by Mario Sieglie

was driving down the freeway when suddenly the car started to shake as if it were in a blender. Outside, I noticed the telephone poles swaying wildly back and forth. Back home, my wife watched helplessly as my sleeping daughter was tossed about the bed like a rag doll.

This was back in 1985, when a large earthquake, 7.8 on the Richter scale, rocked Santiago, Chile. Tragically, 178 people perished, and many thousands were left homeless.

In 2010, 25 years later, an even larger earthquake shook Chile, killing close to a thousand people and leaving more than a million homes severely damaged. A tsunami also engulfed several coastal villages. At 8.8 on the Richter scale, it was 500 times stronger than the quake that, six weeks before, had devastated Haiti—that one having caused more than 220,000 fatalities.

And this year, 2011, saw a monstrous 9.0 earthquake—the one that rocked northern Japan and produced a deadly tsunami, bringing Japan to its knees economically. The Japanese have reported more than 18,000 dead or missing and are still dealing with the aftermath of very dangerous nuclear power plant damage.

Just why does the world suffer earthquakes? And will we live with them forever?

### **Terra firma?**

People have long called the earth “terra firma,” Latin for “solid ground,” yet in recent times more major earthquakes have struck the globe than had been recorded in the past couple hundred years. If we compare the 12 strongest earthquakes registered in the world since scientists started to measure them some 300 years ago, *five, or almost half of the list, have occurred within the last seven years.*

“Relative to the 20-year period from the mid 1970s to the mid 1990s,” notes Stephen Gao, a geophysicist at Missouri University of Science and Technology, “the Earth has been more active over the past 15 or so years. We still do not know the reason for this yet. It could simply be the natural tem-



A U.S. rescue team helps search structures and debris on March 16, 2011, in Kamaishi, Japan. A 9.0 earthquake hit Japan a few days before on March 11, 2011, causing a tsunami that destroyed everything in its path.

poral variation of the stress field in the earth’s lithosphere” (“Chile Earthquake Shows Earth More Active in the Last 15 Years: Scientist,” FoxNews.com, Feb. 28, 2010).

### **Fractured surfaces on both earth and moon**

Why are there earthquakes? Geologists explain that the earth’s surface resembles a cracked eggshell. There are seven major “cracks” and 12 smaller ones around the earth, resulting in surface segments called tectonic plates. These plates slip, slide and buckle, causing the majority of the world’s earthquakes.

It’s interesting to note that just as the earth’s surface is fractured, so is the moon’s. It was evidently pelted in the past by so many meteors that it’s lost some of its luminosity. Apparently, the moon was originally far brighter than today, shining reflected light from the sun on the earth as a silvery mirror.

It seems the beautiful refracted glass that covered most of the moon’s surface was dispersed or buried. As lunar photographer C.D. Courter explains, “The surface of the moon is covered with small glassy particles that can serve as wonderful retro-reflectors” (“How Bright is Moonlight?” *Lunar Light Photography*, 2003, p. 1). The meteors cracked open the lunar surface to the point that about 17 percent of it became covered with now-frozen dark lava flows called *maria* or “seas.”

Geologists consider that the earth was also bombarded by similar meteors in its past, but the majority of the craters are now buried deep underneath the planet’s surface or have

Continued on page 21

# TAKE A vacation FROM THE WORLD

*Learn how God provides spiritually oriented time off for you and your family.*

by Dan Dowd

**T**here never seems to be enough time to do everything we want or need to do. The irony for those who live in the Western world is that we have unprecedented access to all manner of time- and labor-saving devices. But as the world economy continues to tighten, how can you find the time or money to take a relaxing vacation?

What would you say if I told you that God provides a “vacation” for us—if we follow His instructions in the Bible? It’s true. God laid out a spiritual vacation plan for mankind. He designed it as time away from the cares, frustrations and demands of this world. Every week He gives us His Sabbath and every year He provides His annual festival days as spiritual vacation days! Let’s look at one of God’s annual festivals—the Feast of Tabernacles.

We are told in Leviticus 23, where the festivals are listed, that on the ancient Hebrew calendar, “the fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD” (Leviticus 23:34). That corresponds to a September-October time frame on the modern calendar.

How does keeping the Feast of Tabernacles become a vacation from the world? Part of the point of these holy festivals is to show us that this world is temporary. The Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering pictures a time when abundance will fill the earth. During this week we are to enjoy special meals and family outings to help us physically envision the era when Jesus Christ will directly rule the nations on earth—the time of the Kingdom of God.

In fact the Bible says, “You shall spend that money [saved up for the feasts] for whatever your heart desires, for ox or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 14:26). The funds referred to are part of a

**During this week we are to enjoy special meals and family outings to help us physically envision the era when Jesus Christ will directly rule on earth.**

tithe (literally 10 percent) of our income that God tells us to save and use to rejoice before Him at His annual feasts. It’s the way we honor and acknowledge God’s blessings while enjoying some good things we may not be able to afford the rest of the year.

If we obey God’s law of tithing, then we have almost a tenth (allowing for costs involved in also observing the other annual festivals) of our annual earned income to spend in a little more than a week and the time for travel. You can afford and enjoy a pretty nice time with a tenth of your annual income! Plus, we have that week to set aside the cares of the world. We don’t have to worry about work, chores, errands, problems or concerns for an entire week. We can focus on something bigger than our lives—something that will last for eternity.

If you’d like to learn more about taking a wonderful vacation from the world, please request our free booklet *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. You can read it online or order your free copy at [www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets). Happy (spiritual) vacationing!

**Dan Dowd** is the assistant managing editor of *Vertical Thought* and lives with his family in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He also serves as the United Church of God pastor there and in two other Wisconsin congregations.



*Family dinner outing*

## Soaking up the world of summer camp!

by Ed Dowd

**N**o more studying, no more tests. No more gym class or complicated mathematical formulas. No more book reports or science projects. School was out; the entire summer lay before me! Now the question was: How would I fill my summer?

I have fond memories of summers as a teen and young adult. My favorite summers were those spent at the Church's youth summer camps. They were incredible! Growing up a somewhat shy and reserved kid, summer camp afforded me the grand opportunity to step outside my "comfort zone"—in a safe and protected environment. No one teased me over the two cowlicks on my head, the clothes I wore, riding the bus in high school or not celebrating Christmas. Instead, at camp everyone believed the same way I did when it came to church and religion. There was a tremendous atmosphere of encour-

**Wouldn't you like to live in a world of friendship, support, encouragement and love?**



Rafting



Christian living class



Archery class

Creating the Zone is no small task. Bullying, teasing, excluding others or practical jokes, while commonplace at school, is not permitted at camp. In building this millennial-like experience, we encourage teamwork, serving others, camaraderie, celebrating others' successes, experiencing pure fun and discussing God's way of life. We want our staff and campers to truly witness that God's way works!

Think of it as a *world away from the world!* Living in the Zone compels awareness of a world to come that is far better than the world we live in—a world where parents have successful marriages, where people are focused on helping others and where cheaters don't win. Living in the Zone means behaving in ways that promote serving and caring genuinely for others.

Society teaches that we can do whatever we want. You may be familiar with the bumper sticker that says "COEXIST"—where each letter is a different religious symbol. While

some see this as merely encouraging religious tolerance, the symbols cohering together evenly into a word seem to imply that all religions are equally valid. Such mentality is inconsistent with the world that Christ will establish at His return. Many in society deem that smoking is okay, that excessive use of alcohol is okay and that sex before marriage or any form of sexual immorality is okay.

You won't find these things in God's world to come! With the start of each camp week, campers define the Zone daily by kind and responsible personal conduct, looking forward to a world that is much different from the world we live in.

Wouldn't you like to live in such a world? A world of no hurt, no pain, no sorrow. A world filled with compassion, friendships, support, encouragement and love. What a world that will be!

You can take a vacation from the world around you. Decide *now* to be a better person, living the way of life that Jesus taught would characterize God's wonderful world to come!

Learn more about your opportunity to grow to be part of that world beyond this present, troubled world—and even beyond the joys of youth camp—by reading our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*, available by mail or on our website.

**Ed Dowd** is the pastor of three United Church of God congregations in Kansas. He also enjoys serving staff and campers each year as the United Youth Camp director for Camp Hye Sierra in central California.

agement, support, togetherness and brotherhood.

Now I help direct the United Youth Camps program, wherein we place a huge emphasis on what we call "The Zone." The Zone defines the environment of our camps. But it's more than what our staff and campers do and say. It extends to how we interact—even how we think—during each week of our six camps.

Working together in great concert, all participants strive to create an environment that, as much as possible, is a foretaste of what the world will be like during the Millennium, the coming 1,000-year rule of the Kingdom of God on earth through Jesus Christ, as described in the Bible. In other words, we want to have the campers experience something fantastically unique—a small picture of how things will be when everyone on earth is living God's way of life!

**I**magine a man who defended his nation against all comers, failing sometimes but winning often. A man who knew he would be king from a young age but loyally served a hostile leader until he could claim the throne.

Now imagine another man who centuries later faced massive reversals of fortune until national leadership was offered to him. A man who faced down one of the worst villains in history. A man who exerted great personal courage and who valiantly led and developed the talents of those around him in the quest to win a life-or-death battle to save his nation.

## MEN OF VALOR:

# KING David & WINSTON Churchill

*The Bible and more recent history offer lessons of courageous and wise leadership.*

by Amanda Stiver

We know these two great men as King David of ancient Israel and Sir Winston Churchill, prime minister of Great Britain during World War II. But let me reintroduce them to you as we draw some powerful lessons from their famous lives. We'll consider the latter first.

### **A leader of men**

Winston Churchill commanded the British military machine that nearly single-handedly held back the tsunami of Nazi power that threatened to swamp Britain and her allies during the Second World War (1939-1945). We hear him quoted often, but what do we really know about him?

Churchill was born into British high society in the late 1800s. His mother was Jennie Jerome, a wealthy American, and his father was Lord Randolph Churchill of the house of Marlborough. Young Winston grew up in the outwardly beautiful—and often inwardly warped—Victorian upper-crust society where children barely saw their parents, being

raised by governesses in grand homes with extensive grounds.

A precocious child, Churchill was once trapped by playmates on a bridge during a game of chase. Rather than give up, he chose to jump off the bridge, a dangerous decision that nearly cost him his life. Later, as a young man, he summoned that bravery and risked his life to escape from a prisoner-of-war camp in South Africa during the Second Boer War (1899-1902). Once safe, he went right back into the war zone.

Finally, as prime minister during World War II, he courageously faced down Adolf Hitler and the Nazi war machine. His masterfully written and powerfully delivered speeches are famous for the way they galvanized the whole of Britain and her allies into a fighting force that withstood all the violence Nazi Germany threw at them.

### **A leader under God**

King David was a mighty ruler of the ancient

Israelites, and we remember him as the slayer of the Philistine giant Goliath. But what else do we know about him?

David was the eighth-born son of Jesse, a wealthy landowner from Bethlehem in the tribal region of Judah—Judah being one of the 12 tribes of the nation of Israel. David came of age shortly after Israel had rejected the Eternal God as its supreme king. The people demanded a human king (1 Samuel 8), and God gave them Saul, who turned out to be a deeply flawed man under whom David endured much hardship.

In his youth, David, who had shepherded his father's flocks, was anointed by the prophet Samuel to replace Saul as king. From that age he was uniquely blessed with God's Spirit. David demonstrated great courage even during what appear to be his teen years. His physical strength and cunning against marauding lions and bears while a young shepherd, as well as in vanquishing Goliath (1 Samuel 17), served him well in later life as he led the armies of Israel and eluded enemies, both foreign and domestic.

### Victory through courage of conviction

As king, David presided over the beginning of the Golden Age of Israelite history. God gave Israel many military victories at this time, greatly expanding her physical borders.

Today the true followers of Christ are spiritually not part of this world or its political-military establishment. As Jesus said: "My Kingdom is not of this world. If My Kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My Kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). Nevertheless, we can learn valuable lessons of character and leadership from great political and military figures.

King David and Winston Churchill were undeniably brave, and both led by example. So courage in standing up for what is just served them and their people well. Striving to stand for what is right is a lesson not just for physical soldiers, but for those who have dedicated their lives to God and to the example of Jesus Christ. Standing up for God's truth takes a great deal of courage, especially when the world around us fails to value or respect God or His way of life.

### Well-organized coordination

Of course, bravery by itself is not enough. In military matters, courage without good planning is often futile. King David had 37 mighty men of valor who served him loyally. Their names and exploits are listed in the 2 Samuel 23. He organized their ranks to function for the benefit of all.

But David didn't limit his organization to the army. He also structured the ranks of the tribe of Levi. These were men whom God had dedicated to serve in the tabernacle and later the temple, conducting priestly sacrifices, performing music, teaching the people God's laws and keeping the sanctuary in good repair.

**"Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities . . . because it is the quality which guarantees all others."**

—Sir Winston Churchill

There were a great many Levites, and to have them all serve at once in a disorganized mass would have been a waste of resources, causing confusion and frustration for everyone. King David organized the priesthood into divisions, sometimes called courses, which rotated into their appointed service times throughout each year. In fact, the priestly Levites, descendants of Aaron the first high priest, served in these same courses at the time of Jesus Christ, nearly 1,000 years later.

Churchill likewise brought increased order to his nation. He relied on the brilliance of others to find solutions to the military challenges Britain faced during World War II. As prime minister he surrounded himself with people of skill and expertise. He listened to their ideas and encouraged them to innovate. That innovation produced many devices and organized efforts that helped fight the war, among them the minesweeper machines of the invasion of Normandy and the covert code breakers at Bletchley Park.

### Walking points of valor

What can we take away from all of this? Courage of conviction in the face of negative cultural pressure is vital in our or any age. In fact, Sir Winston put it this way: "Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities . . . because it is the quality which guarantees all others."

Organization and motivational encouragement are sterling qualities to incorporate into our lives. Keeping things neat and organized in everything from sports equipment and homework assignments to setting up for church activities benefits everyone. We are less stressed when things are easy to locate and events follow a schedule. Organizing *people* is the greater challenge of course.

Respect for authority is essential to harmonious effort and progress, so leaders should strive to be *worthy* of respect. When you have an opportunity to lead, always remember what it feels like to be under authority and use your leadership kindly. Listen for the ideas of others, and don't be afraid to give them credit. A leader who serves his followers is the greatest of all!

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*Tired of feeling behind where you ought to be in school? It's time to take action.*

by Sue Dunkle

**D**o you find yourself scrambling to produce that five-page English literature paper? Are your grades not what they should be? Many young adults find themselves overstretched and overwhelmed by their educational pursuits!

Well, positive change requires effort. Numerous success experts cite the key, commonsense principle that you succeed *by what you do*—not by who you are or how you look. Let's examine five traits that all successful students share—traits we should all strive to develop.



## ORGANIZATION

Sixteen years of teaching in public and private schools has taught me that many students struggle with being organized. Countless times I've witnessed students open lockers to reveal a stack of papers, lunch bags, gym shoes and mystery food items jumbled together in a compacted pile that would rival a local landfill. After offering my "cleaning" services to help tidy up the locker, we often found, in the very bottom of the pile, that science or other paper that had been due two weeks earlier! Situations like this can easily be avoided by simply setting up a folder for every class and taking unnecessary items home.

Setting up folders or binders for each class is a simple way to keep papers in order so that you can grab them at a moment's notice. If you write papers on a computer, setting up a folder for each class helps in the same way. Maintaining a basic filing system not only helps you with your studies, but also develops useful skills that will serve you well when you enter the professional workforce. Additionally, a daily or weekly planner is a valuable tool for recording due dates for exams, projects or events.



## TIME MANAGEMENT

There are only so many hours in a day, and many students have to juggle their studies, extracurricular activities and even part-time jobs. To make the most of your study time, set aside some of it every day to go over your notes or readings from each class. Studying or reviewing class material a little each day helps you retain long-term the information needed for an upcoming exam or project.

Compare this to pulling an all-night cramming session in which the information only makes it tenuously into your short-term memory. Another good time-saving study habit is to develop short mnemonic devices or lists of phrases that will help you to remember important concepts from a particular subject.



## ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

I enjoy teaching most when my students take an active role in their learning process, and I can safely say that almost every other teacher feels the same. So don't be afraid to ask questions! Good teachers welcome questions from their students and will want to provide the right answers.

By taking an active role you will help clear up any concerns you might have about the content or gaps in your understanding—and it will also help class time to fly by. This is also good time management! If the teacher's answers still leave you without a clear understanding of a concept, then take the initiative to ask for extra tutoring from the teacher or another student.

*Taking steps to be a successful student probably won't come easy, but put in the extra effort and don't give up!*



## GRIT/DETERMINATION

There's a poster in my classroom that says, "You are responsible for you!" This is absolutely true. If you the student are struggling to understand the material and the teacher isn't aware of it, then the teacher can't help you.

You have to have the grit or determination to dig in your heels and not wait till the last minute to ask for help. Talk to your professor or teacher privately during office hours to explain your situation. Then make a commitment to do extra work if necessary to master the material. Going the extra mile and making the effort to get help will show your instructor that you're serious about the class. This may enable you to get extra tutoring from the teacher or from his or her assistant. Of course, extra help will only matter if you are making your own best effort. Put in the extra time and don't give up!

Grit played a valuable role for me in my final semester of college. I was enrolled in a probability and statistics course and was not doing well at all. In fact, I had failed the first test! I wasn't grasping the concepts, so I went to the professor, explained my problems and asked for help. I needed to pass this course at least with a "C" in order to graduate!

As a result of meeting privately with the professor, she offered to give me extra one-on-one tutoring sessions. I didn't give up. I went to those sessions and studied daily, and finally I began to understand the content. Because I persevered—used grit—I began to improve my test scores and daily work, which finally resulted in a "B" on the final exam! And yes, I passed the course and received my education degree!



## SELF-DISCIPLINE

Finally, no amount of organization, time management, participation or grit will matter one bit if you don't exercise the self-discipline to implement these strategies. As a student you will have to be dedicated and self-disciplined to reach your goals. You will simply have to make yourself do things that may not come naturally—and often it won't be fun. Taking steps to be a successful student probably won't come easy at first, but if you introduce just a little of the above strategies into your academic life one day at a time, you will be well on your way to becoming a successful student!

**Sue Dunkle** has taught in public and private schools for many years and now resides with her husband Frank and son Conner near Portsmouth, Ohio.

# The Teacher

Have you ever had an instructor who was so involved and encouraging that she was willing to give up her personal spare time to help and serve her students? What about a teacher who willingly gave up his life *entirely* for the good of his students? A few of us may have heard of someone like this, but it's rare.

Yet there was One who did just that—the best example in all history. He was Jesus Christ—the Son of God, Savior, Prince of Peace, Carpenter, Healer, soon-coming King and ... Teacher.

Not only did He offer up His life in the greatest sacrifice, but He was a wonderful and skillful instructor. Jesus used a variety of techniques to reach His students, the disciples.

To illustrate the importance of His main subject, the Kingdom of God, He used stories called parables to reach the hearts and imaginations of His disciples—albeit, they didn't always catch on right away (see Matthew 13). He also took them on field trips to important locations that would underscore the meaning of His words (Matthew 16, 24; Mark 4-5).

Christ skillfully lectured to large audiences (and performed amazing miracles to heal and feed them, Luke 9:10-17), but He could also insightfully counsel on an individual basis (John 4). He even had a sense of humor, using hyperbole and exaggerated imagery to make a point (Matthew 7:1-6).

So what does this mean for us as students? It should help us see that both teacher and student must make great effort to achieve great learning! Understanding our instructors—the challenges they face and teaching techniques they employ—helps us receive a better education.

—Amanda Stiver



# Lingua Franca: A Lesson in Language

*Learning another language is hard but worth the effort,  
helping to build bridges across cultural divides.*

by Frank Dunkle

It was a beautiful day in Metz, France, as I sat on the top of a medieval stone wall looking out over the city. What an amazing experience! Unfortunately, the policemen who quickly approached did not agree. They were angry, I could tell, but the words they spoke were mostly incomprehensible. Quickly I scampered back to street level and did my best to apologize with my limited command of the language. How could I explain that this was just a misunderstanding—that I was not a vandal? If only I had studied harder in French class!

How about you? Are you learning a new language, or thinking about doing so?

School language programs are one way to learn. There are also self-directed study courses available in books and computer software. Friends and family who already know another language are a great resource. It's often been said that the most effective way to learn a language is by complete immersion into an environment in which only that language is spoken. Effective it is, but it's still a challenge to learn even one of the many languages of the world!

Learning another language takes hard work and lots of practice, but there are many good reasons for making the effort. Hopefully you'll never need to worry about dealing with angry police in a foreign country, but it never hurts to be prepared!

## From one language to many

How many languages are there? The Linguistic Society of America puts the number at 6,809. This is considerably more than the 1,000 estimated by *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1911. The actual number of languages has not dramatically increased within the past century, but many have been discovered during that time. Often these languages are shared by a relatively small number of people, and those who use them often also speak one of the more common "power languages." English, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, Russian, French, Hindi, Arabic and Portuguese have become the means by which most of the world's communication occurs.

How did so many languages come into existence? Scholars propose a variety of theories, but the Bible actually explains the process. It says in the book of Genesis that after Noah's Flood at the building of the Tower of Babel, people all shared the same language. To separate the various peoples of mankind, God caused different groups to suddenly speak

only in new languages different from one another—so that the various groups could no longer readily understand one another (see Genesis 11). Otherwise, technological progress would have advanced too quickly, leading to all sorts of potential trouble for the ancient world.

Modern scholars may not accept this biblical account, but they cannot deny that breaking down the language barrier helps people overcome differences and accomplish much more.

Following the Babel incident, languages evolved and further divided as people groups split up, with tribes becoming isolated for periods in their migrations. And as different peoples interacted, their languages also influenced one another.

## English still prominent, but other languages on the rise

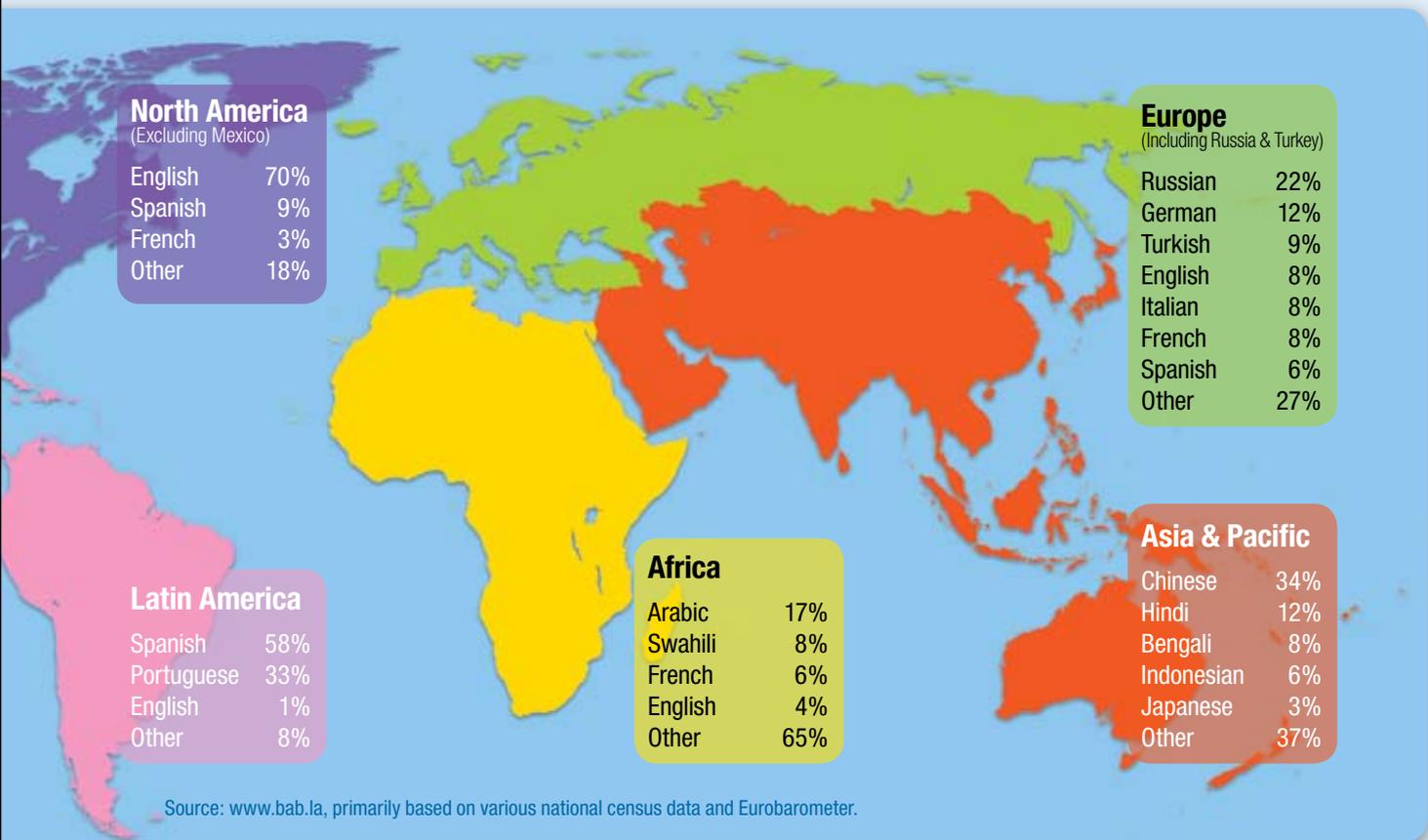
An old joke says that if someone who speaks two languages is called bilingual and someone who speaks three languages is called trilingual, then the person that speaks only one language is called... an American! This is no compliment to my native county, but the fact that you're reading this in English is a significant reason Americans have been slow to learn other languages. They already know the language that has the farthest reach and the most influence. That seems to be changing though, and it has certainly not always been so.

A few hundred years ago England was a minor military power and a cultural backwater, but as Englishmen built an empire, they spread their language around the world. The prominence and influence of former British colonies like the United States, Australia, India and South Africa assured that English would continue as the world's leading international language even after the British Empire was dismantled.

However, as our 21st-century international business and diplomacy are increasingly conducted in other languages, a young person would be wise to learn one or more of these. Attaining fluency in the right language could open rewarding career opportunities. But there's more to gain than just economic or social advantage.

## Mother Tongues

Who speaks  
what as their  
first language?



## Making connections, sharing ideas

In *Vertical Thought* we strive to think above our everyday lives and focus on matters of the highest importance. Relating to others is one of those matters. Language—any language—is a means of communication, of sharing ideas between people. Whether the channel used is the written or spoken word, or some other means, the language used encodes an idea that exists in one person’s mind so that it can be transmitted to someone else. To communicate the idea successfully, both people must understand the same language, and when they do, they can build a relationship that would be impossible otherwise.

For example, during the Renaissance era in Europe many nations sailed the waters of the Mediterranean. Each had a different tongue, so in order to conduct business they had to use a common language. Since the Italian city states ruled the waves, what emerged was a combination of mostly Italian with French, Spanish, Greek and Arabic. This was called the *Lingua Franca* (Latin and Italian for “Frankish language,” as Greeks and Arabs had long referred to all Western Europeans as Franks, i.e., French).

Yet the term *lingua franca* has come to mean any common language between people of different language groups. In fact, for several centuries before the domination of the English language, French was the *lingua franca* of diplomacy around the world.

When you learn to communicate in a new language, you’ll find that you can make connections with and gain an understanding of people who were previously cut off from you. The Linguistic Society of America and other language experts describe how a language provides a community’s connection

with the past, its traditions, and a vital base of knowledge. It puts people on the same wavelength.

## Many tongues, one message

The Bible gives an illustration of the value of shared language, just as it earlier showed the difficulties arising from language barriers. When a large number of Jesus’ disciples gathered after His crucifixion, a miracle occurred whereby listeners were all able to understand what was proclaimed, even though they spoke a variety of languages (see Acts 2). This not only showed God’s power, but enabled people from different countries to be brought together as an active Church and a dynamic work.

Just as interesting to us today is a Bible prophecy indicating that in the future reign of the Kingdom of God on earth there will again be only one language (Zephaniah 3:9). Free and open communication will be the rule around the world. Imagine the possibilities that would arise if you spoke the same language as every other person on the planet!

We don’t know exactly when that time will come, but you don’t have to wait for a miracle to communicate with people who now speak a different language!

Happily, after my adventure in France, where, thankfully, the police did not arrest me, I determined that during the remainder of the travel-study class I would take greater care in my explorations. Wishing I had worked harder to learn another language did not help me then, but it inspired me to put in more study later. You, too, can open a door to new opportunities right now by learning a new language. *Bon courage!*

**Frank Dunkle** lives with his wife Sue and son Conner near Portsmouth, Ohio, where he serves as a United Church of God pastor.



# Fairy-Tale Weddings:

## What's for Real?

Getting married is not all glitz and glamor. But there's a great deal to look forward to—and reason to focus on preparing.

by Amanda Stiver

In a quiet English village a little girl grows up, goes to college and meets a prince. Several years later they marry and she becomes a duchess. Their marriage ceremony is viewed by billions of people and she begins a lifetime of high-profile media scrutiny.

Early this year Prince William of England married commoner Catherine Middleton, and this modern-day “fairy tale” took place. Millions of people were drawn into the national fervor and joy of the event. But does getting married really seem like a fairy tale? Does a young woman prepare her entire life just for this one event?

### Bursting the bubble

Instinctively we say, “There is so much more to a marriage than just the wedding!” We list: everyday life, paying bills, learning to put up with someone else’s faults, eventually dirty diapers, etc. We go to great lengths to debunk the fairy-tale ideal so that young women can prepare for the tough road ahead. But doesn’t it seem to drain the joyfulness from anticipating marriage?

There must be a way to preserve hope and joy yet face reality. The celebrity world, however, doesn’t seem to have discovered it. Hollywood romances and marriages, often built up in entertainment news coverage, are just as gleefully dissected and torn apart when they fail. It seems the popular culture personified by these individuals is always looking for love but never finding it.

### The real deal

So how should a young woman anticipate marriage? What is expected of her?

The book of Proverbs contains a final chapter (Proverbs 31) that beautifully and poetically expresses the attributes of a stellar lady. She is, depending on which translation of the Bible you’re reading, a “virtuous” or “valiant” wife.

Her husband prizes her proven trustworthiness. She is a faithful friend.

She is also an active, productive lady and never at a loss for industriousness to benefit those around her. She is skilled at everything from sewing and thrifty shopping to having excellent taste, keeping fit, cooking, wise household planning and so much more. She is also, most pointedly, a businesswoman of good repute. She runs her own business, helping to support her household and contribute to her family’s good standing.

### Preparation

The valiant woman’s checklist seems daunting, but she didn’t come by her abilities overnight. It takes time and effort to learn those skills—a tradition historically passed from mother to daughter but less so today. Sometimes we must seek opportunities to learn skills society doesn’t emphasize. Gaining expertise in home economics is inherently practical for when you marry.

But what if I’m not married yet? Is it still worth it to prepare to be that virtuous wife?

Absolutely! Fundamentally the woman of Proverbs 31 is an outward thinker—wise, strong, honorable and kind. She lovingly serves others through outgoing acts of service. Those traits are elements of the character of Jesus Christ, and we all, man or woman, married or not, strive to be like Him!

Dreaming of marriage isn’t foolish fantasizing about a one-day wedding blowout. Nor is it an exercise in futility. It is actually a beautiful part of fulfilling our destiny to grow to become like God, reflect His love and eventually be made immortal in His divine family.

**Amanda Stiver** is a *Vertical Thought* staff member and a freelance writer and editor from Columbus, Ohio.

# Me, Us, Them:

## My Journey to Wife and Motherhood

*Marriage and family brings broadened perspective.*

by Lisa McKinney

**M**e. Us. Them. These three words summarize in time order how my priorities have changed over the last ten years of my life. They explain the journey of moving from a young single woman to a wife and then a mother.

When I was single, my priorities related to *me*. My goals were *me*-oriented and my prayers were *me*-focused. In reading the Bible then, I related it to my own life. And when I was baptized, I tried to use my experiences in life and love to magnify my understanding of God's love for His people.

It was the best I could do with my limited understanding of what it was like to love someone else with a deep, everlasting, unconditional love ... until I got married in the fall of 2002.

### Wife

Being blessed with the love of a wonderful husband changed everything I thought I knew about the love God has for His people. Suddenly I had someone who loved me unconditionally—even with my endless list of shortcomings.

It was different than knowing your parents loved you “no matter what,” because they didn't actually choose you! My husband *chose* me—and deemed me worthy enough to bind himself to me forever. Now I have an even deeper understanding of the blessing of being one of God's “chosen generation.”

His Word tells us, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

How blessed I am to be one of the chosen daughters of God!

I discovered that with this understanding of the depths of unconditional love came the change from a *me* to an *us* focus. I was no longer as concerned about my own interests as wanting what was best for *us*. Even in my prayers, I asked that everything I did physically and spiri-

tually would enhance my relationship with my husband. The prayers for *me* were directly related to our growing together.

But then I took another step. Now it's not just *me* and *us* anymore. It's *them*.

### Mom!

My boys are my pride and joy. Seeing the world through their eyes brings a greater appreciation of what it means to come to God as a little child! The biggest change they brought to my spiritual life was to help me much better understand what it was like for God the Father to give “His only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

It's no longer all about *me*. It's not just about *us*. My focus is now on the future—for *them*.

My heart breaks when my boys get hurt—no matter how small the injury! I can only begin to imagine the depth of emotion God felt when He witnessed the crimes committed against His Son and then saw His death. It's something no parent wants to experience!

My priorities are directed toward my children. The majority of my prayers are devoted to their behalf—from me helping them learn about God, to me setting a good example for them, to prayers for protection for them from the evils in this world. It's no longer all about *me*. It's not just about *us*. My focus is now on the future—for *them*.

Of course, this broadening of focus helps us to focus more outwardly on not just our own children, but on all of God's children in the great family He is building.

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Lisa McKinney lives near Vanceburg, Kentucky, where she and her husband John are busy raising their boys and are actively serving in the local congregation of the United Church of God.

# What Does It Take to Be a

# REAL MAN?

*What's a "real" man? Could you pick him out if you saw him walking down the street? And how can you be one?*

by David Cobb

**I**n popular media, men are often portrayed as dense, selfish, arrogant, sexually immoral and at least potentially violent. A man who acts the way society thinks he should, particularly toward women, is often referred to as a "real man" or a "man's man."

Sadly, this popular image of "real" manliness is based on misinformation and bad assumptions. God, the designer of human beings, sees things differently than society does.

"Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature ... For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Looking at the heart is a concept lost on much of modern culture. It's much easier to use only what we see as the basis for our opinions and actions.

What does the Bible actually say about being a *real man*? If we look closely, we can find three keys to true masculinity to help us understand how men should treat women and others in general.

## **Real men respect**

To respect something is to consider it "worthy of high regard." This is exactly the attitude that God says men should have toward women. That means all women, by the way, not just those we consider physically attractive.

Jesus Christ is the perfect example of this behavior. His followers taught that husbands ought to love their wives "just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her"—and that husbands should "love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself" (Ephesians

5:25, 28). True love is based on fundamental respect.

Wives, in turn, are told to respect their husbands. Clearly, this is meant to be a mutual respect, a reaction to the respect her husband is already showing her.

Ultimately, though, God wants us to treat *everyone* with an outgoing, unselfish concern and deep respect for their well-being.

## **Real men protect**

To protect is to shield someone from exposure, injury or destruction. A man who respects others will act to protect not just himself but others as well from various forms of exposure and injury.

Consider the biblical story of Ruth. A young Moabite woman, she was the daughter-in-law of Elimelech and Naomi, an Israelite couple who fled to Moab (in the area of modern-day Jordan) to escape a terrible famine in Israel. In the course of time Elimelech and his two sons died. Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, were left alone with no support system.

Naomi decided to return to her homeland, and Ruth courageously went with her, even though she would be leaving her native Moab to live as a foreigner in Israel. Her future was incredibly uncertain, and she was extremely vulnerable. Enter Boaz.

Boaz was a wealthy and noble man of high social standing. He was just the kind of man who could have ignored two struggling widows, especially one who was a foreigner. But

Boaz was a man of godly character who exercised his duty to protect those who were at risk. He personally saw to it that their basic needs were met. He kept watch over Ruth as she worked to help support her mother-in-law. As the near relative of her deceased husband, Boaz chose to marry Ruth and assume the provision and protection for her and aging Naomi.

Life provides many, many opportunities to serve others by protecting them or their interests. Ultimately, God wants us to demonstrate His character by being willing to protect *anyone*—especially the most defenseless among us.

### Real men take responsibility

Many today would rather talk about their “rights” than their obligations and duties, but there has never been a greater need for men who are willing to take responsibility for their actions.

Real men do not take a woman’s most precious gifts (her heart, mind and body) without having committed through marriage to keep them forever. Engaging in physical intimacy with a woman before marriage is stealing. It is taking something that is not yours, which is an irresponsible failure to respect or protect the woman—and it is a sin, a violation of God’s law.

A real man doesn’t use excuses about being caught up in the passion of the moment and not being able to resist temptation. That story doesn’t carry much weight with God. It is possible to resist!

A man who takes responsibility for his actions has the wisdom to anticipate compromising situations and think pro-

## Never miss an opportunity to practice these key concepts of true manliness, shouldering your responsibility to protect and respect.

actively about how to avoid them. Translation: vertical thinking men avoid being alone in intimate circumstances with a woman before marriage! The book of Proverbs puts it this way, “A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished” (27:12).

### Becoming a real man

There are many situations in life where we can do the right thing only by taking responsibility for our own actions. Ultimately, God wants us to demonstrate His character by being willing to take responsibility for *everything* we do, protect those in need and deeply respect women.

Never miss an opportunity to practice these three key concepts of true manliness. You can avoid the trap of false masculinity and its negative consequences by shouldering your responsibility to protect and respect so that in the end you will truly, in God’s eyes, be a real man.

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**David Cobb** attends the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation of the United Church of God with his wife Mandie and two young children.



## Sometimes the world around us is a tragic place.

### How do we cope? How do we find hope?

We need a lens—to see beyond the tragedy—to see a brilliant future.

That lens is the Bible, and that future is the Kingdom of God.

To learn more about bridging the gap between our world and the future, read our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, available at [www.ucg.org/booklets/](http://www.ucg.org/booklets/)



# Battling Empathy Deficit Disorder

*Empathy for others is waning. Why? And what should our focus be?*

by Scott Hoefker

**W**e live in a very quickly mutating, societally shifting, culturally challenged world. Many have stated in the press that, without any intention to, they feel they're becoming hardened to things going on around them. I hear the same thing as a professional counselor.

And it's not just large-scale tragedies that fail to evoke the level of feeling for others deemed appropriate. The everyday sufferings of others around them seem to cause them little anxiety. Concern for friends, coworkers and even family members seems to be falling by the wayside.

What's the common root of the problem, and what should be done about it?

Empathy is a positive trait that's necessary for a healthy mental outlook

## Focusing on the wrong things

One person mentioned, "Yeah, I can sympathize ... but, like, I really don't empathize with anyone anymore." What's the difference?

**Sympathy** typically reflects understanding of another person's situation, but viewed through your own eyes.

**Empathy**, on the other hand, is what you feel when you enter the internal world of someone else. Without giving away your own perspective, you experience the other person's emotions, conflicts, worries or aspirations. That kind of connection tends to build healthy relationships, which are an essential part of mental health.

Sadly, we're seeing more and more among young people what professional counselors are calling Empathy Deficit Disorder. EDD develops when people focus too much on acquiring power, status, things or money for themselves at the expense of developing healthy relationships with others.

Nearly every day brings the sad news of people who have derailed their lives in the pursuit of money and recognition

and ended up in rehabilitation or incarcerated. Many people I cross paths with in my occupation—therapy patients, college students, business clients—struggle with their own versions of this very thing. They alienate themselves from their own hearts and begin to equate *what they have* with *who they are*.

## What did Jesus tell us?

In the Bible, Jesus Christ profoundly connects the building of healthy relationships with depositing treasure in the spiritual realm: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). Our "treasures" speak loudly of who and what we are.

We live in a world where true empathy is quickly being lost. It's almost an art form that someday will disappear. However, that need not be. Jesus set before us the two great commandments: first to love God and secondly to love our neighbor as ourselves (see Matthew 22:36-40)—and that's where empathy comes into play.

Thinking vertically, upward towards our Creator, helps us understand the deeper meaning of what He intended for everyone. He considers empathy a critical attribute in our relationship with Him and with all those He's created.

## Chart an empathetic course

Societal trends need not always be followed, and cultural shifts need not always be accepted. You don't have to not care about others.

Empathy is a positive trait necessary for a healthy mental outlook and function. Truly becoming interested in others, sharing their lives and walking with them will produce "treasures" in your life that will last forever. Neither moth nor rust can corrupt empathy!

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**Scott Hoefker** and his wife Gayle live in Charlotte, North Carolina, where he serves as a counselor and associate pastor for United Church of God congregations throughout the state.

# God's Got a Plan

From page 5

to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom *the whole family* in heaven and earth is named" (Ephesians 3:14-15, emphasis added).

Why did God create you, me and everybody else? Because God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and God desires to express love to a vast multitudes of others, ultimately by sharing with them the ability to love on the same level. God intends to raise us from physical, human existence to spirit existence as divine children in the very God family. That's the plan!

## Our crooked world made straight

I could see the world's problems and injustice in 1967—and deeply wished that something would be done to help straighten it out. That's part of God's plan. The Father and Christ do not leave any loose ends.

God is a god of justice, and justice will be done. The crooked behavior and culture of human history must be corrected, and it will be—when God enables people under His direction to right the wrongs of the past. Man must prove that he can under God live in peace. All the protest marches and donations to causes on earth will not bring justice and peace. Only the direct rule of God through

Jesus the Messiah can do that.

In powerful poetic language, Scripture presents God's promise to heal and make fair every corner of human experience:

"Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 40:4-5).

God's got a wonderful plan to do all this for 1,000 years after Jesus Christ returns to the earth (Revelation 20:5-6). Those assisting the true Messiah will then help stop war, stop crime, stop immorality and establish law (*God's law*) and order, joy and laughter. These last four elements go together hand in glove. Human life and love will become what it should have been all along. Human civilization will then reach its apex under Christ when multitudes of God's human children at last become His divine, spirit children in His eternal Kingdom!

You can learn much more about God's plan by subscribing to our free *Bible Study Course*, which will guide you from passage to passage in the Bible until God's plan for humanity becomes your aim too!

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**Randy Stiver** serves as managing editor for *Vertical Thought* and teaches at Ambassador Bible Center in Milford, Ohio.

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# What's Shakin'

From page 7

been worn down through erosion. As one geologist noted, "Even though preserved craters are rare on Earth, there is no reason to suspect that Earth has been bombarded any less intensively than the Moon (which has millions of impact craters), and thus the vast majority of Earth's impact features must have been erased" (*World of Earth Science*, 2003, p. 1).

## Angelic rebellion, a devastated earth, and creation renewed

The Bible describes the breathtaking initial creation of the earth by God in Genesis 1:1. It tells us in Job 38:4-7 that the angels shouted with joy when they saw the beauty and perfection of the original creation.

Yet, in Genesis 1:2, we read that the earth, as the New International Version of the Bible says in its margin, "became" *tohu* and *bohu*—the Hebrew words for something chaotic and empty. What happened to its initial beauty?

Again, God's original creation of the earth was so perfect and beautiful that the angels shouted with joy. Everything our Creator does is organized and well planned. But somehow the earth had become chaotic and empty such that God had to restore and refashion it to make it a suitable home for mankind.

The Bible does not give us the details of how this happened, but we do later read of an angelic rebellion, when the archangel Lucifer ascended with a third of the angels to try to oust God from heaven (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel

28:11-19). The Bible tells us that a battle ensued and that Lucifer, now called Satan, was cast down with his angelic cohorts (or demons) to the earth (Luke 10:18), where they still dwell and hold sway until their coming time of judgment.

We also read about God "renewing" the face of the planet in Psalm 104:30. This harmonizes with the rest of Genesis 1, which describes how in six days God raised the land from the sea and then populated both land and sea with vegetation and animals, as we still see around us. As His crowning achievement God created humankind.

## The curse on man's world and its future lifting

Later, we read in Genesis 3 that the earth was subjected to a curse because of man's sin. It would now become a world of toil, sweat, pain and death (some of it caused by geologic and atmospheric calamities). This is the present flawed and imperfect world we live in. Deadly earthquakes, tornadoes and hurricanes will continue to occur and intensify until Christ returns to the earth (Matthew 24:7-8).

When Christ reigns, God has promised He is going to renew and heal the earth to its former pristine beauty (Acts 3:19-21). There will no longer be earthquakes and other catastrophes to worry about. Everything will be beautiful, peaceful and joyous under the reign of the coming Kingdom of God (Isaiah 11:6-9). We look forward to that wonderful world to come, in which there will be no more devastating earthquakes to lament!

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## The Blind Shall See ...



Recent research by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology finds that even when sight is absent, the part of the brain that processes visual information is still active, proving the brain is more flexible than previously understood. Likewise, parts of the brain that normally control specific functions, like sight, can be repurposed as the brain rewires itself after injury or illness.

When blind individuals who participated in a study were tested, researchers discovered that as braille, the system of raised dots on paper representing the written alphabet, was being read with fingers, the brain's visual cortex was active. Blind participants' visual cortices were also active in ear-focused listening sessions involving complex grammatical patterns and sentences (Brandon Keim, "Sight Gets Repurposed in Brains of the Blind," *WiredScience.com*, March 1, 2011).

"Fearfully and wonderfully made" is how the Bible describes the human body (Psalms 139:14).

## Does Your Diet Synergize?

A new area of study in nutrition science, food synergy, is proving that certain food combinations can increase, sometimes more than doubling, the beneficial aspects of single foods.

Traditional cultures have long known about combining foods to release all nutrients. Eating lime with corn products releases the B-vitamin niacin, and beans and rice complete all 22 essential amino acids. According to research, however, there are far more combinations than previously realized.

Apples contain an anti-inflammatory flavonoid called quercetin, and chocolate contains the antioxidant catechin. Together these two may more powerfully contribute to lowering the risk of heart attacks and hardening of the arteries, as



well as cancer (Kathryn Rubin, "Healthy Eating: Food Synergy," *The Jerusalem Post* [JPost.com], Feb. 9, 2011).

God made a brilliant, health-giving world of fruits, vegetables, lean meats, dairy, grains, oils, and fats for us to use to take care of our bodies, each of which is meant to be "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Taking care of that temple responsibly is our challenge!

## Catch the Rhythm!

Is your internal clock in the wrong time zone? As recent research at Northwestern University in Illinois reveals, each organ has cells with genes that act as clocks, determining what processes function when. Disturbing the 24-hour circadian rhythms of those clocks can result in organ dysfunction and may lead to weight gain, depression, digestive upset and other maladies.

According to the researchers, the brain is like an orchestra leader that keeps

all the clocks in various organs in sync. When the brain and organs fall out of sync, health declines. Experts believe that knowledge of body timing, when to take medications, when to eat, may lead to new ways of treating illnesses ("How Your Schedule Can Help (or Hurt) Your Health," *The Wall Street Journal* [Online. WSJ.com], March 29, 2011).

In the meantime, get adequate rest every night, and develop a sleep schedule where you go to bed and rise at the same time each night and morning, seven days a week.

# 56+

**The percentage of college students who are women as of 2009 Census data**

—Sharon Jayson, "More College 'Hookups,' But More Virgins, Too," *YourLife.USAToday.com*, March 30, 2011



## Let's Play!

"Teach your kids to play" is the theme of organizations like the Alliance for Childhood. According to researchers and experts who study childhood culture, the art of unstructured play is being lost. Parents are encouraged to teach their children to play by showing them how to organize a makeshift ball game, build a fort in the living room, etc., and then leave them to it.

The overscheduled and micromanaged world of kids' sports and schools that no longer allow recess for fear of injury lawsuits has deprived children of the joy of necessary playtime. Psychologists believe play is essential to children's well-being because, among other things, it helps them develop, on their own, imagination and social skills like sharing and cooperation (Hilary Stout, "Effort to Restore Children's Play Gains Momentum," *NYTimes.com*, Jan. 5, 2011).



## Archaeology: Just Google It!

An interesting use of technology has emerged in the field of archaeology. Google Earth, the program that allows unprecedented access to detailed satellite views of the earth's surface, is being used to study the topography of the earth in search of ancient ruins. Already, some have used the program to find what they

have theorized to be the controversial lost city of Atlantis--time will tell. However, another historian believes he has found multiple historical sites in Saudi Arabia simply by searching for the shapes and forms of ancient tombs and other structures on Google Earth.

This avenue of research has grown useful because many nations don't allow actual excavation for political and religious reasons (Praveen Swami, "Google Earth Finds Saudi Arabia's Forbidden Archaeological Secrets," *Telegraph.co.uk*, Feb. 4, 2011).

In the realm of biblical archeology, this could prove beneficial for future research because several events in the biblical narrative occurred in areas of the Middle East where biblically oriented excavation may be frowned upon.

## Zechariah's Tomb?

Israeli archeologists have begun excavations on a 1,300-year-old church in Khirbet Midras (also spelled Hirbet or Horbat Madras), near Beit Shemesh in west central Israel. Found beneath the church were Roman era ruins, caves and tunnels used during the Bar Kokhba revolt in A.D. 132, coins, pottery, stone vessels and lamps. It is purported to have been a memorial structure built over the tomb of Zechariah, the prophet who lived around 500 B.C., as marked on the famous Madaba Map, a mosaic map of the Holy Land on the floor of a sixth-century church building in Jordan.

The site was previously identified, but not yet excavated. Some suspect it may also have been the home of Zechariah and not just his burial place. Further excavation might verify this theory (Hugh Collins, "Archaeologists May Have Found Tomb of Prophet Zechariah," *AOLNews.com*, Feb. 2, 2011).

However, as Todd Bolen of BiblePlaces.com points out, "Given that the sources for this appear to date nearly 1,000 years after Zechariah's death (c. 500 BC), it may be best to regard this as a dubious Byzantine tradition"—at least for the time being ("Byzantine Church Revealed at Khirbet Midras," *Blog.BiblePlaces.com*, Feb. 2, 2011).



Other scientists, however, continue to search for the possibility of extraterrestrial life (Heidi Blake, "Alien Life Deemed Impossible by Analysis of 500 Planets," *Telegraph.co.uk*, Jan. 23, 2011).

What does the Bible say about aliens from other planets? God made the heavens and the earth, and that incredible process is described in the book of Genesis and referred to in other parts of the Bible. Nowhere does it say that God created another habitable planet at this time. However, God has promised "the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven ... to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage" (Deuteronomy 4:19). You see, God made the earth and the human beings that inhabit it for a special purpose: to eventually inherit the whole universe as His eternal, divine family of spiritual children. That is *our* destiny! (See our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* to learn more.)

## 7 hours, 38 minutes

The average amount of time each day a child spends in front of a screen, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation study.

—Hilary Stout, "Effort to Restore Children's Play Gains Momentum," *NYTimes.com*, Jan. 5, 2011

## Wait! There's More ...

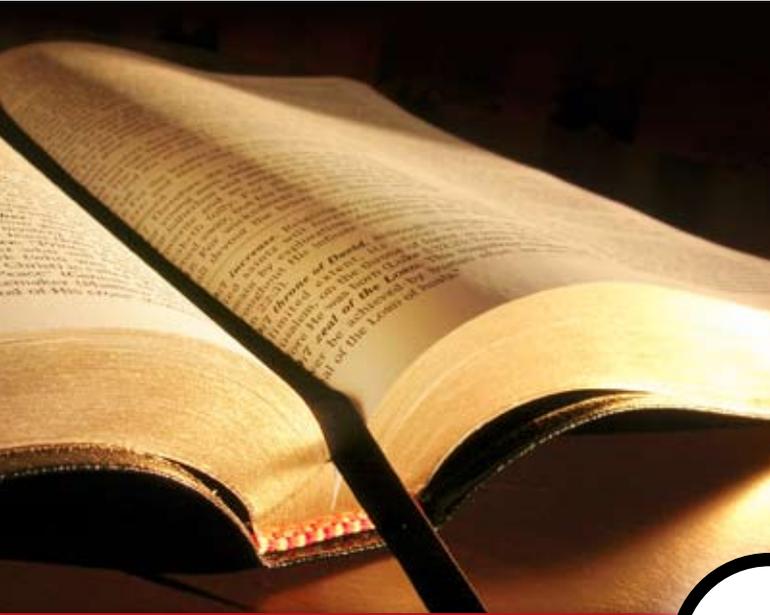
If you'd like to see more articles and our weekly commentaries, jump over to our website. There you'll also have access to all of our back issues and answers to commonly asked questions.

[VerticalThought.org](http://VerticalThought.org)



## Extraterrestrial Letdown

New analysis from Harvard University lends support to the long-held conclusion of many that no extraterrestrial life exists in the universe. A top astrophysicist explained that no other planet of the 500 or so analyzed has the stability in temperatures to allow life, as we know it on earth, to exist.



**The Holy Days of the Bible,  
which came from God**



**The holidays of man, which  
came from guys like this**

- Passover
- The Days of Unleavened Bread
- Pentecost
- The Feast of Trumpets
- The Day of Atonement
- The Feast of Tabernacles

These picture eternal joy, peace, prosperity, the ultimate victory of good over evil and the Eternal Creator God!

- Valentine's Day
- Easter
- Halloween
- Christmas
- And many more...

These represent pagan deities, greed, immorality and the championing of evil. Don't believe it? Look it up in an encyclopedia!

**Which do you choose?**

To develop a more informed opinion, read our free booklet ***Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*** Available at [www.ucg.org/booklets/](http://www.ucg.org/booklets/)

