

THE LONELINESS ANTIDOTE

Why Did God  
Create Tobacco?

One Leaf of Grass

April-June 2011

# Verticalthought®

*a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's leaders*

Your Invitation to  
**Believe the Gospel**



The Most  
Misunderstood  
Message

What Will Those  
Converted Today Do in  
**the Millennium?**

A Modest Example:  
**What Your Clothes  
Say About You**

Commentaries  
From Our Website

## Why *Vertical* Thought?

**R**emember when you were 8 years old? Life stretched out before you as an endless adventure. Seems like a long time ago, doesn't it? *Vertical Thought* will soon turn 8—and it's been a great adventure!

VT is a magazine for your generation. Its purpose is to positively present to you explanations of the true values of life—the reason you are here on earth at this time. We want to give you the actual understanding of what is to come and how you can mature as tomorrow's leaders.

*Vertical Thought* isn't afraid to talk about God. True faith is strength. We live in a twisted, troubled world that possesses very little core belief beyond "self." VT challenges you to get out of life's rut, out of the "pit of despair," to think in a whole new direction. It's in our name.

In the spring of 2003 the United Church of God was ready to launch a magazine designed for you. But what name would capture attention quickly in these fast-paced times?

As a pastor in the Pacific Northwest I hosted a young adult's Bible class and engaged those fine young minds in the name search. We brainstormed over 30 possibilities—some serious, some humorous.

"How about 'Vertical Thought'?" asked Hansel New. (See his commentary in this issue.) Fresh and unique—no one, so far as we could discern, had ever used it, and it made the cut.

But before giving their approval, the Church's 12-member Council of Elders asked: Why "vertical thought"? To some it sounded like a psychology magazine.

Our editor asked me to provide the answer.

"Vertical" is popular and describes anything that goes up—defies gravity—like snowboard jumps or a basketball player's vertical jump. To climb a rock face or climbing gym wall, you must go vertical. It's a practical descriptor regularly and creatively used to mean "up."

Since "thought" automatically makes you think,

or at least think about thinking, then "vertical thought" means thinking upward—toward God. (See Colossians 3:1-2 as mentioned in the staff box below).

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

We want God's ways to be our ways and His thoughts ours. We want and, deep inside, long for "vertical thoughts."

With that explanation, our Council understood the relationship of the two words and balloted unanimously to approve *Vertical Thought* as the name for the magazine. The rest is now almost eight years of exciting and inspiring history.

This world is not a happy or a safe place—just watch a little of the news about the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, or about earthquakes and dire economic problems of nations, states and provinces. Consider the eroding of morality around you—the weakening of Bible-defined marriage, the breakdown of family connections, the despair and emptiness of your peers. Our sad, old earth appears to have a penchant for anti-vertical thinking.

All people, you and I included, need solutions to these troubles. This planet needs a lot of vertical thoughts—it needs to look up to the true God of the Bible in word and action. And it will—when Jesus Christ returns to set the world right and establish what He calls the Kingdom of God. That's the good news Jesus personally offers you and me. And that's the vertical thinking that we'll deliver in *Vertical Thought* for the next eight years and beyond!

Keep thinking vertically, and invite others to do the same!

### *Vertical*thought

*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.

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*When Jesus talked about the gospel, He meant good news for you.  
He invites you to not only enjoy the world's best news yourself, but to help spread it!*

by Mike Bennett

God has sent you an incredible invitation. Did you get it? Have you replied?

### **What are you invited to?**

When you read to the end of God's Book, you are given a sneak preview of some amazing and awesome aspects of the event you are invited to. The descriptions are almost beyond human comprehension:

- An out-of-this-world celebration—the marriage supper of the Lamb (Jesus Christ).
- The breathtaking beauty of the New Jerusalem.
- The healing and satisfying water of life.
- A universe where pain and sorrow are replaced with joy and fulfillment.

What do you call all these fantastic things? The Bible describes all this and much more as the Kingdom of God.

And you are invited!

God says, "I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Revelation 21:6-7).

God offers you eternal life, the universe and to be His children!

Jesus then adds, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work ...' Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:12, 14).

### **The invitation goes out**

The book of Revelation gives the end of this story, but we have to go to the Gospel of Mark to find Jesus Christ's first announcement of this invitation.

After defeating Satan's temptations, Jesus began His ministry by going to Galilee to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God. "At last the time has come! he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Turn from your sins and believe this Good News!" (Mark 1:14-15, New Living Translation).

Along with the good news (or "gospel" in older translations), Jesus told us how to respond to His personal invitation.

### **"Turn from your sins"**

Sin is breaking God's laws (1 John 3:4). God created His good and perfect laws for our benefit. And if we repent

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# The Most Misunderstood Message

*Why was the Messiah's gospel message twisted, ignored and largely forgotten?*

by Mike Bennett



**P**sst! Did you know that Jesus Christ came to the earth with a message that could transform the world? Somehow, though, in the course of the last couple thousand years it has been lost, overlooked or taken as a metaphor.

No, it's not in one of those "lost" Gospels that seem to keep turning up. This message is hidden in plain sight.

Strangely enough, the people who wanted Jesus dead actually understood a part of His message that most people who claim to love Him today do not.

## What do you mean, King?

Evil King Herod believed the wise men who said they were coming to worship the infant King of the Jews. His solution? Kill all the babies to make sure there would be no rival for his throne.

Later, the religious leaders who called for Jesus' crucifixion accused Him of plotting a revolution to take over as king. When the Roman governor Pontius Pilate asked Jesus about this, He answered: "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born" (John 18:37).

He even told His disciples that when He came back to the earth they would be ruling under Him, each over a tribe of Israel (Luke 22:30). How much more literal can you get?

## What do you mean, Kingdom?

What did Jesus say His message was?

"Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15).

*Gospel* is just an old English word that means "good news." The gospel of the Kingdom of God is good news because it describes the time of Jesus Christ's return, when it will be announced that "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15, New International

Version).

Jesus knows the way of peace. Look around—people today do not. Jesus knows how to heal people, give them enough to eat and help them learn how to be truly happy. People today do not.

Jesus Christ's gospel of the Kingdom of God truly was revolutionary. He is going to turn this crazy, mixed-up world right-side up. He's going to fire the evil, corrupt leaders and replace them with leaders who care and actually put others above themselves.

The effects will be stunning. Utopia will break out!

## The Biggest News Story in History: **CHRIST RETURNS!**

**Who:** Jesus Christ, who came once already to pay the penalty for our sins to become our Savior, returns to put an end to sin as our King (Revelation 11:15).

**What:** Christ puts an end to human misrule and sets up the long-promised Kingdom of God (Daniel 2:44).

**When:** In the nick of time before humanity destroys itself (Matthew 24:22). Christ gave signs to identify the end time, but He did not reveal the "day and hour" (Matthew 24:36).

**Where:** Starting with Jerusalem, this Kingdom will spread over the whole earth (Zechariah 14:3-4; Acts 1:11-12; Matthew 5:5; Revelation 5:10; Daniel 2:35).

**Why:** Christ returns because it is part of God's plan to show love for everyone, to bring many children to glory (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 2:10).

**How:** God's laws—the way He designed the universe to work—will be taught and will bring real peace and prosperity, but most of all a loving family relationship, to all the world (Isaiah 2:2-4).

## Is the Church the Kingdom?

Some think the Church is the Kingdom of God. Although there is a connection between the two, they are not identical. Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22), which is the body of believers called by God to proclaim the coming Kingdom.

Christ rules His Church; thus it is under His sovereignty and royal power. We might say the Church is the precursor of the coming Kingdom of God. Or, to put it in terms that Jesus used, we can say that the Kingdom of God is similar to the proverbial mustard seed, waiting for its germination and rapid growth at Jesus' return (Matthew 13:31-32).

The Bible, however, never uses the term "kingdom" to apply directly to the Church. Instead, the Kingdom refers to God's prophesied world-ruling government.



## Is the Kingdom Within You?

Many people believe Jesus Christ taught that the Kingdom of God is something that exists only in the hearts and minds of believers. They base this on Luke 17:20-21, which says: "Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, "See here!" or "See there!" For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.'"

But what did Jesus actually mean? The Greek word *entos*, translated "within," is better translated "in the midst of" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, "Within"). Several translations, including the Revised Standard Version, the Jerusalem Bible and the New English Bible, make this clear. Jesus could not have been telling the Pharisees here that God's Kingdom was something that existed within their hearts or minds—after all, they wanted to destroy Him (Matthew 12:14; Mark 3:6).

Instead, in this passage Christ was pointing out the paradox that the Pharisees did not have the spiritual discernment to recognize that the revelation of the Kingdom of God was at hand or being offered to them (Matthew 23:15-17). To punctuate this point, Jesus, referring to Himself, said "the kingdom of God is *among* you" or "in your midst." The spiritually blind Pharisees did not recognize Jesus as the divine Representative of that Kingdom.

Rather than telling the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was something in their hearts, Jesus Christ warned them that they were so spiritually blind they couldn't recognize the very embodiment of that Kingdom in Him. There is no basis in this passage for believing the Kingdom of God resides in people's hearts.

## Over time the gospel of the Kingdom of God was lost, with the term "Kingdom" treated like nothing but a figure of speech.

Here are just a few of the headlines we can look forward to:

- War Colleges Close
- Stripped-Down Tanks Turned Into Tractors
- Pet Lion—Lovable King of Preschool Playground
- Formerly Disabled People Thank Jesus Christ for Healing
- AIDS Wiped Out

### How the gospel got lost

So how did the gospel of the Kingdom of God get lost, with the term "Kingdom" treated like nothing but a figure of speech?

Time was one culprit. Many in the Church believed Christ would be back to set up His Kingdom right away. As the years and decades ticked away, people began looking for other explanations for this "Kingdom" thing. Patience is not our strong suit.

Maybe the Kingdom is just in our hearts, or maybe the Church is the Kingdom, some thought. (Scriptures used to support these ideas are explained in our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.) The idea of a real Kingdom became less and less popular until it almost disappeared.

This process was accelerated by the infiltration of false teachers preaching a different gospel (2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Galatians 1:6-7). The Bible warns that Satan the devil is out to snatch away the hope from our hearts and that he blinds and deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9).

The Bible also warns that not all "Christian" teachers are really of Christ. (For a historical overview of the rise of a counterfeit Christianity, see our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.)

## Newfound hope!

Too often in this world things can look hopeless. So finding and believing this good news about the Kingdom of God can change our whole approach. Instead of being beaten down and discouraged, we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. We can know that our loving Savior and King will rescue us.

When you see the reality of this hope, you can start to get inspired to pray eagerly, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10). Read more about how you can be involved in preparing for the Kingdom of God in the accompanying article, "Your Invitation to Believe the Gospel," and in the inspiring booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. You can read or order it online at [www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets).

## The Kingdom of God Is Real

Jesus Christ's good news about the Kingdom of God is about a real future kingdom on this earth. If it weren't, why would the Bible say:

- "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).
- "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).
- "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:10, NIV).
- "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6).
- "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:2-4).
- "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

In fact, understanding that the Kingdom of God is real is the only way that the inspired prophecies throughout the Bible all make sense. It's a beautiful and unifying thread through the tapestry of the entire Bible.

To put it simply, the gospel without a real Kingdom of God is like a hamburger ... without the meat.

## Your Invitation

From page 4

of sins and strive to follow His laws of love, we will be blessed.

Repentance involves both asking for forgiveness (through means of Jesus Christ's sacrificial suffering and death in our place) and seeking to turn away from sin and live the right way like Jesus did. The good news motivates us to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

The gospel, or good news, was on the apostle Paul's mind in his first letter to the Christians of Thessalonica. He mentioned it four times in the second chapter alone! In that context, he reminded them: "We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you into his Kingdom to share his glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:12, NLT).

By following Jesus Christ's example of obeying God's law of love, we will be living by the rules of God's Kingdom now, and will be proclaiming the good news silently by our example (Matthew 5:16).

### "Believe this Good News!"

The second thing Jesus asked us to do to respond to His invitation is to believe the gospel. The Bible also calls this belief *faith*.

"What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see ...

"So, you see, it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him" (Hebrews 11:1, 6, NLT).

By studying the invitation (the Bible) and communicating with God through prayer, we can grow in our belief in these seemingly unbelievable promises.

We can come to know that the unsolvable problems of today's world really can be solved. We can know that the hopelessness of humanity can be replaced with solid hope from God. We can believe that our loving God has truly invited us to be His children in His Kingdom forever!

Belief leads to action. Take time to study some of the actions God wants from us in response to His invitation: Mark 16:15; Acts 2:37-42; James 2:14-17. Helping to spread the good news, committing our lives to God and living the way of give are all part of our RSVP to God's invitation.

To understand more about this wonderful good news of the Kingdom of God, read our inspiring free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. You can read or order it online at [www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets).

**Mike Bennett** and his wife Becky and two daughters live near Cincinnati, Ohio.

# What Will Those Converted Today Do in The Millennium?

*Jesus Christ wants you to work with Him in serving people in His Kingdom! What will He have you do?*

by Peter Ekama

I've always been fascinated by the Millennium—the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ on the earth, which will commence when He returns to establish the Kingdom of God over all nations. Particularly intriguing to me are its implications for those of us who become truly converted Christians in God's Church today.

God offers the gift of eternal life to those He calls who believe, repent and are baptized and live His way during this life. We will take part in the Millennium as glorified spirit beings. We have the chance to be like Christ, even as He is (1 John 3:2). So what exactly will those who become God's sons and daughters in this age be doing during the Millennium?

## The job description

Revelation 5:10 gives the basic job description: We will be kings and priests and will reign on the earth. But what does that job truly entail?

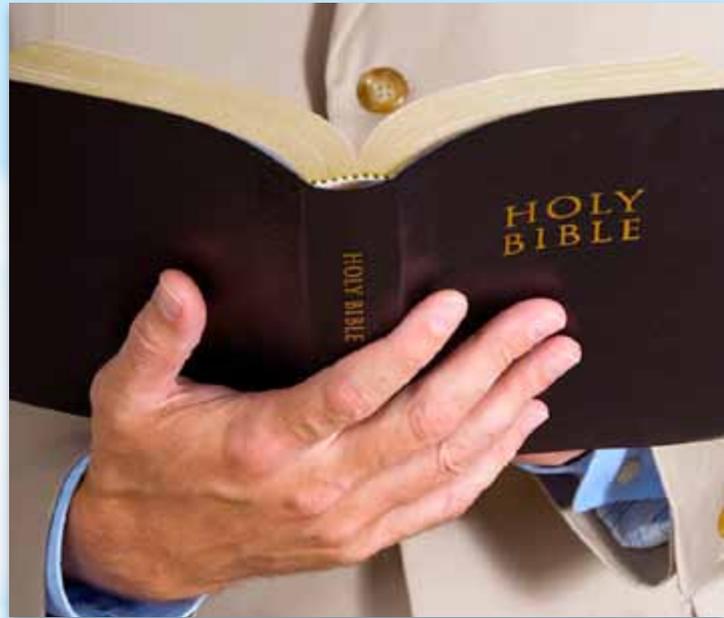
The best example of serving as a king and priest is our elder brother Jesus Christ. He practiced godly leadership His entire life and taught by His example compassionate service to others. Christ's instruction to the apostles in Matthew 20 demonstrates that godly leadership is much different from what is generally practiced in the world today. To rule with Christ in the coming Kingdom of God, our leadership has to be focused on service to others.

"Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant," Jesus said. "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28).

Servant leadership is a selfless act, motivated by love. Our actions in the Millennium will be of the same nature. So whom will we be serving in the Millennium?

As always, we will serve God, of course, but in the sense of helping others, our serving work will be that of guiding and directing the people of the earth. The world of the Millennium will still be a physical one, though under the rule of God through Christ. Our focus will be not on pursuing our own enjoyment but on first aiding and then teaching the thousands of displaced people who survive the calamities at the end of the age.

As the Millennium progresses, the dire consequences of Satan's influence over the world today will become a distant memory. And over the course of generations, humanity will need to be reminded and warned that Satan will



be let loose at the end of the Millennium. They will need to be taught about the coming of God the Father to His Kingdom in a new heaven and new earth.

What better teacher is there than one who has experienced life during Satan's reign and chosen right? We have that opportunity to be there for these succeeding generations. Those in God's Church today know what it's like to live a life where, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, Satan's influence can be resisted and overcome. And those of us who've grown up in the Church prior to conversion have a unique perspective that should drive us even more to want to be there to teach young people in the Millennium and after.

After living our lives in spiritual battles and overcoming, our experience can be used to mentor the coming generations of God's family.

## WHY we will teach

How much do you yearn for all mankind to know the way of God? When we are kings and priests in the Millennium, how much will we desire that all people would join us in the family of God? How much do God and Jesus Christ desire it for us? (See 2 Peter 3:9.)

We will be there serving and teaching because of the unquantifiable love that God has for humanity, for His future sons and daughters in His family. Jesus Christ died to make our inheritance possible (John 3:16). He also serves as our High Priest before God and as an example to us.

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# A Modest Example: What Your Clothes Say About You!

by Amanda Stiver

**“Your dresses should be tight enough to show you’re a woman and loose enough to show you’re a lady.”**

This great quote is attributed to Edith Head, top costume designer for both Paramount and Universal movie studios during the 20th century. Hundreds of films benefited from her creativity. Her statement here describes a way of dressing that can be summarized as “classy” or “tasteful.” And it illustrates the fact that modesty is not a uniform or a one-size-fits-all proposition.

Modesty, in terms of decent attire, involves following guidelines. These allow us to wear clothes that express our personal style and taste but that still properly cover us, are gender appropriate and are respectful of those who see us on a daily basis.

Let me pare this down into some effective exercises you and I can regularly use to achieve our own personal, modest style.

## 1. Ponder modesty

What are some of the elements of modesty? Modesty is a way of practicing outgoing love toward others. A woman who covers her body appropriately is showing regard for her male acquaintances by not tempting them to lust. Likewise, a man who wears clothes that fit well but are not too tight helps his female acquaintances pursue purity of thought.

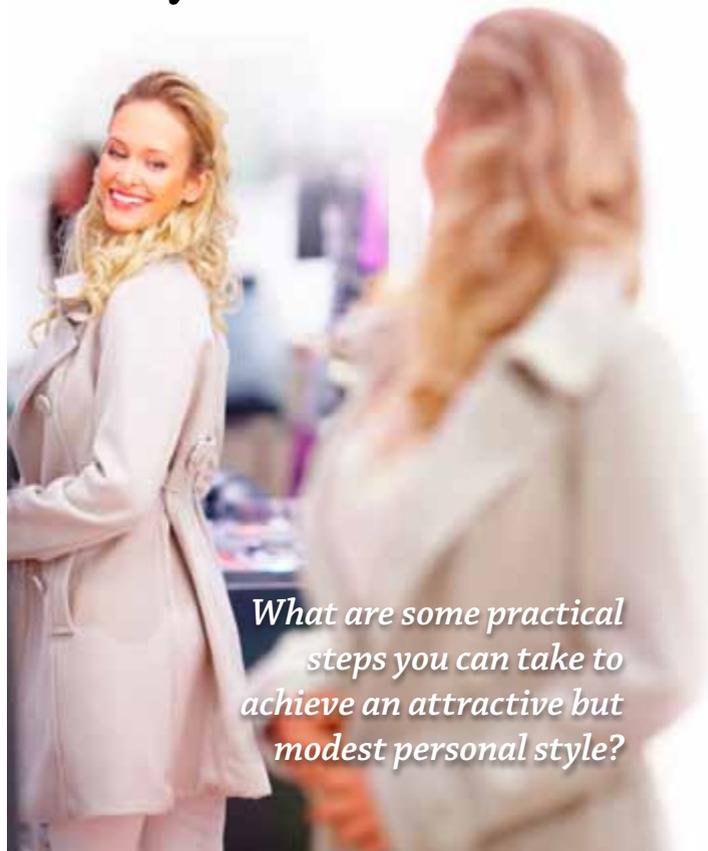
What is modest on one person may not be modest on another. A dress that falls below the knee for a short woman can for a taller woman be too short, and therefore immodest. Thus, modesty is also an ability to discern appropriateness of personal style.

Modesty can also depend on the situation. Stretchy exercise shorts and a sleeveless top, while appropriate for freedom of movement and temperature comfort in a fitness class, are inappropriate for church services. In the Bible the priests at the temple of God in Jerusalem had special clothes to wear as part of worship services. This and other factors have led to the conclusion that we should maintain a high standard of dress in worship services today. That typically means wearing the best semiformal clothes we have available.

We need to be mindful that how we dress and carry ourselves will be connected to the message we represent as members of the Church of God. If we dress immodestly but talk about purity, we are guilty of a double standard!

## 2. Dress like ... a work of art?

The ultimate master artist of all time is the Eternal Creator



*What are some practical steps you can take to achieve an attractive but modest personal style?*

God. Under the direction of God the Father, Jesus Christ, long before He became human, made the entire physical universe and the spirit realm.

God shared some of His creative ability with us. Regarding the artisan Bezalel, who would construct the tabernacle of God in the wilderness, God stated, “I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to *design artistic works*” (Exodus 31:3-4, emphasis added). While this was a special case, all of us have been given certain talents.

So how do we employ whatever measure of artistic gifts we have to the way we dress ourselves and to modesty?

If you sew, apply those skills to adapt clothes that need a bit more coverage here or there. If you don’t, ask someone who does to help you. And try to learn more about how things are made. Buying well-made clothes that are not overly trendy is a wise investment.

## 3. A matter of inches, not feet: the mirror test

Finally, take a few minutes once you are dressed for the day to stand in front of the mirror. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not encouraging vanity! The mirror is your best tool to see what others will see when they look at you. Are you modest? Will you be disrespecting others and yourself if you go outside this way? Do you represent yourself, and your God, well?

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## Have you ever been *really* lonely?

Katie Spatz knows what lonely means. She's the young American adventurer who rowed by herself across the Atlantic Ocean in 2010.

Covering 2,817 miles in 73 days, Spatz had to struggle through the physical strain of rowing, the fear of inclement weather and dangerous sea life. But most of all, she faced the extreme loneliness of having no one else around on the vast, open ocean.

### Lost and alone

Maybe we haven't crossed the sea alone in a rowboat, climbed a mountain solo or trekked the Sahara Desert on our own, but we've *all* been lonely.

Life can hand us circumstances where we are physically all by ourselves. If you've ever gone back-country camping or hiking and been separated from your fellow campers, you know the fear that can well up inside and tug at your thinking, begging you to panic.

Good wilderness instructors teach how to avoid that panic and what to do about it. By following a logical progression of steps, you can ride out the fear and maintain your presence of mind. With clear thinking you can take stock of your *actual* situation, including what resources you have available, and develop a positive plan of action.

### Alone in a crowd

Loneliness can also creep into our lives when family life isn't perfect. Even people who love each other don't always know how to express outgoing concern, and in the course of time they can hurt each other deeply. It's possible to become lonely even while living among friends or family.

Young people who are old enough and economically stable may want to become married, but when there is no one of the opposite sex to date, especially within a particular religious faith or belief set, it can be an

emotionally lonely time.

Panic can set in, not unlike what happens when we get lost on a hike. The emotions scream, and the brain seems to shut off! Fear leads to despair, and hopelessness is an unhealthy place to be.

### Hit the "don't panic" button

The physical and emotional stress of being alone is a starting place. Just like being lost in the woods, we have to establish a "don't panic" rule and develop a set of actions that will lead to a better place—a place filled with caring friendships and strong, positive relationships! What, more specifically, should we do?

**Pray:** Here's the secret: We are never completely alone! God is always aware of us and of what we are thinking. We are only a prayer's length from His intervention. So start with prayer. Tell God how you feel, and ask for His help and mercy.

**Assess:** God says if you "ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22). But we also have to do our part. Take stock of the situation. Are you actually alone, or do you simply *feel* alone—having become, as is common, simply drawn into yourself?

**Act accordingly:** If you are truly in a dangerous situation at home or among friends, leave and find help. If your problem is too much inward focus, turn your perspective outward and seek others around you. Show concern for them; see if maybe they, too, could use more friends. Talk to them. Listen to them.

And make yourself friendly. This is difficult for shy people, but the first step is the hardest. After that it becomes easier to meet a stranger and make an introduction. There are nearly 7 billion people on the earth—so in this lifetime there will always be someone new to meet!

**Develop an action plan:** Make a list of people to connect with. The elderly who can't leave their homes or care centers love to receive notes, phone calls and visits. Likewise, get-well cards will encourage those who

are dealing with health challenges.

Skills and hobbies we've always thought about, but never tried, can be a great starting point. Join a club or take a class! Have you always wanted to learn to step dance? Go find a group of amateur Irish dancers to join! Want to work with clay? Take a pottery class! Joining a group or class is a fantastic way to meet people, and often these are provided free or at very low cost at community centers.

An outward focus is essential to fighting loneliness. Showing love and outgoing concern will bring love into your life. God made it that way!

### Love and loneliness

For those who are single and want to be married, it can seem like everyone around them is finding "the one" while they are still alone. We are each at a different stage in life, but circumstances can be discouraging.

The apostle Paul wrote, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Philippians 4:11).

Contentment and gratitude are two important antidotes to loneliness. Contentment is often defined by the preconceived aspirations we have for ourselves. But God's timing and His goals for us are often different than we expect. Always remember, God's plan is the best!

The hard part is reconciling His path for us with the one we think we want. This is the point of Paul's instruction: We must accept that wherever we are, that is according to God's will. The lessons we learn may be greater than we could ever imagine, and they are preparing us for eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

### So now what?

Being unmarried isn't a one-way ticket to Hermitville. An active, productive, outward-looking single life will connect us with others, bringing companionship and close friendships. And it can enable important pursuits. Historically and biblically, God's servants were both married and single. Being single has at times

# The Loneliness Antidote

by Amanda Stiver

*Feelings of loneliness can overwhelm and discourage us. What can we do to combat these debilitating feelings?*

been advantageous—with less familial responsibilities like parenting allowing more time to spend on God’s work of proclaiming the gospel.

Look around. Are there ways to serve? Are there experiences to enjoy that won’t be as available after marriage, like travel and educational adventures? Seek those out!

Don’t give up on your married friends though. Keep in touch with them! They may need your perspective from time to time. Likewise, married folks, don’t forget your single friends. Though the focus of our lives may differ, good friendships are worth maintaining.

## **Good-bye, loneliness**

Loneliness is just a starting place. Where we go from there is a mark of the character we are developing.

Establish a “don’t panic” approach to combat loneliness. If we feel inward and caught up in self-pity, the antidote is to turn outward and think of others. Try to understand how they feel, and learn how to reach out and encourage them.

The Golden Rule, the guiding principle of proper interaction with our fellow man, is to do to others as we want them to do to us. If we want to be less lonely, then we should help fill the lives of others with care and friendship. It takes effort, but the end result is priceless!

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# Why Did God Create Tobacco?

by Dan Dowd



**H**e had been through this operation before, and the doctors had told him then the same thing they were telling him now: “You have to quit smoking.”

He had tried many times before—and after every one of these surgeries—but after a week or so the cravings were too much and he went back to smoking. One lung had already been removed over the course of several operations due to lung disease and damage caused by smoking, and now he was facing surgery once again to remove more of the lung that was left. A lifetime of cigarette smoking had ravaged his lungs and his body.

This man was my great-uncle, who eventually died from complications related to smoking. His was a familiar story, as too many others have faced the same consequences of a smoking habit.

With such clear evidence of the medical dangers of smoking tobacco, we may sometimes wonder: Why did God create such a plant?

## History of tobacco use

The regular use of tobacco originated among various native peoples of the Americas going back thousands of years. When European explorers discovered the New World, they took back to their homelands this use of tobacco.

As the British colonies in the Americas expanded, tobacco became a chief commodity traded for European manufactured goods. The intensive labor required to grow it, as well as its high economic value, helped to drive the increase of slavery in the Americas.

## Consequences of smoking

Initially tobacco was thought to be a wonder drug, curing or alleviating many medical ills. But ever since the U.S. surgeon general in 1964 released a study highlighting the negative effects of tobacco, it's been well documented that tobacco use is accompanied by serious health concerns. Yet despite widespread awareness of the dangers, and even with warning labels on tobacco products, the use of tobacco continues unabated. Consider that:

- Worldwide, tobacco use causes more than 5 million deaths per year, and current trends show that it will cause more than 8 million deaths annually by 2030 (*WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2009*).
- In the United States, tobacco use is responsible for about 443,000 deaths per year. An estimated 49,000 of these are the result of exposure to secondhand smoke (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Smoking-Attributable Mortality, Years of Potential Life Lost, and Productivity Losses—United States, 2000-2004*).
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that smoke from burning tobacco contains more than 4,000 chemicals.

## Is there a positive reason for God to have created a plant involved in so much death?

With all these negative effects, why did God create the tobacco plant? When God finished creating in Genesis 1, He stated that all He had made was “very good” (verse 31). Does this mean that it’s okay to use the tobacco plant in the form of cigarettes, cigars, pipe smoking, chewing tobacco or snuff?

No, it doesn’t—any more than it’s all right to eat poisonous plants, overeat, overdrink, or go to extremes with or misuse other parts of God’s creation. In addition to the medical evidence showing that smoking, chewing or snorting tobacco is not good for us, biblical principles reveal that such use of tobacco is contrary to what God wants us to do.

### Biblical principles against smoking

While the Bible does not speak specifically of smoking, it does cover the subject in principle. One of the main scriptures that addresses the heart of the matter is 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body” (New Revised Standard Version). Smoking seriously harms the body—especially over time.

An additional scriptural principle involved with the smoking question concerns our care for other people: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). Science clearly documents the damaging effect of secondhand smoke, as well as the monumental cost of smoking-related health problems to society at large.

Moreover, the ravaging of our own health and possible premature death will cause suffering and hardship to our loved ones. And incapacitating ourselves prevents us from serving others as effectively as we otherwise could. So, out of loving concern for others, a Christian should choose not to smoke. These principles show us that it is indeed sin to smoke.

Compounding the issue is that, for many, it is not simply a matter of deciding to quit but, rather, a difficult struggle with a physical addiction. This is yet another reason smoking is a sin. It results in addiction—in the smoker becoming a slave to an unhealthy habit.

Notice what Paul says about this in 1 Corinthians 6:12: “You may say, ‘I am allowed to do anything.’ But I reply, ‘Not everything is good for you.’ And even though ‘I am allowed to do anything,’ I must not become a slave to anything” (New Living Translation).

### Possible uses of the tobacco plant

So, is there any good to come from the tobacco plant? Why did God create it? The cause of so much of the destruction is from the primary alkaloid in the tobacco

leaves, nicotine. In a refined state, nicotine is an oily liquid and a powerful poison used as an organic insecticide. Even in small doses it can be deadly to human beings, with just a few drops being fatal for an average adult.

Given that God clearly did not intend for the tobacco plant to be smoked, let’s look at some of the emerging evidence of how it might be used:

- The Central Tobacco Research Institute, based in Guntur, India, has filed patent rights for solanole, a medicine extracted from tobacco for use in the manufacture of cancer and cardiac drugs.
- In a research report appearing in the March 2010 print issue of the *FASEB Journal*, scientists explain how they developed a genetically modified strain of tobacco that helps temper the damaging effects of toxic pond scum, which makes water unsafe for drinking, swimming or fishing.
- Jean Nicot (French ambassador to Portugal in the early 1500s) did a great deal of research on tobacco and is credited with isolating the compound now named nicotine (in his honor). Nicot discovered that a tobacco leaf sped up the healing of cuts when applied as a bandage.
- Farmers have used it for centuries to treat bloating and diarrhea in livestock.
- Perhaps the best thing about the tobacco plant is that it can defend other plants from insects. A solution of nicotine in water has been used as an insecticide since 1746 ([faculty.washington.edu](http://faculty.washington.edu)).

While *Vertical Thought* does not endorse these or other such uses of tobacco, it is interesting to consider that such uses have been found. Perhaps God is looking for mankind to discover the proper uses of this plant. As Proverbs 25:2 states, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.”

If you are interested in reading more on the morality of tobacco use, you can access these past *Vertical Thought* articles online:

- “Is Smoking Wrong According to the Bible?” ([VerticalThought.org/issues/vt08/qa.htm](http://VerticalThought.org/issues/vt08/qa.htm))
- “Puff, Puff... Cough, Cough!” ([VerticalThought.org/issues/vt15/puff.htm](http://VerticalThought.org/issues/vt15/puff.htm))
- “Are You Dying to Smoke?” ([VerticalThought.org/issues/vt11/smoke.htm](http://VerticalThought.org/issues/vt11/smoke.htm))

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**L**ong years ago, when I walked the quaint streets of ancient St. Albans in England or strode the surrounding hillsides, I began to consider the world around me more carefully than I had done aboard aircraft carriers in my navy days.

Life began to be a bit more important than preparing to blow our enemies out of the water or out of their lairs on land, wherever they might be hiding. Military strategizing is still very necessary in this mad, mad world of ours, but after we have finished killing each other, then what?

I had gone back to school and was surrounded by students who had little interest in the military, and I met a delightful fellow student with a smile that could launch a thousand ships (no, her name was not Helen) and could stop me in my tracks at a thousand paces. This began to underline the real importance of life.

### Of meadows and miracles

One day after meandering alone beside the nearby river, I climbed a grassy hill to look out over the countryside and then sat down to enjoy the scene. Cows were contentedly grazing on the lush green grass, converting it by means of that special magic of theirs into milk and cream, making possible all the delights of butter and cheese to complement a typical British packed lunch. I snapped off a long blade of grass at its ground-level white knuckle, put the creamy white end in my mouth and joined with the cows in the pleasure of grazing.

This one wonderful blade of grass fascinated me. It was like a long green spearhead, swelling swiftly from the shaft and then thinning off gradually all the way down to its pointed tip. It was a very elegant construction, a work of art surpassing the most delicate piece a skilled

craftsman could make. And indeed it was beyond the capability of the most advanced workshop, laboratory or design studio to replicate because it was a living thing—in short, a miracle.

I focused my eyes again on the fields of grass spread out along the river valley and realized that if this solitary blade of grass was a miracle, then I was gazing upon billions of miracles in those fields below.

I bent my head back to look up at the low clouds scudding across the sky like soft bellied tankers full of water, sent inland to irrigate these fields. If only I had a pointed stick long enough, I could prick those soft gray bellies to bring down the rain. Or could I? No. The rain clouds are another miracle over which we men have no control.

### A miraculous planet

This whole earth is a miraculous planet perfectly placed in the vast ocean of space, anchored to our wondrous sun, which in its turn sails along its appointed path in the Milky Way. It's not as if a bunch of rocks were blown out from some inexplicable explosion in space and everything we see came together by dumb chance. Quite the contrary, we see that everything responds to measurable laws—without which, we would have no science.

More marvelous yet, the earth is filled with life of every imaginable kind, and the more we are able to study it, the more astonishing it becomes.

What is life? We simply do not know, because all our wonderful science cannot unravel the mystery, cannot explain that single blade of grass. A fellow member in God's Church some years ago wrote his doctoral thesis on the intricate work of microbes in the soil that fix nitrogen to the roots of plants—a very complex business, to say the least.

### The wonder of you

Dear reader, have you yet realized that you are, in and of yourself, akin to an individual universe composed of trillions of interactive cells, and that each one of those cells is a microscopic city of immense complexity? And have you realized that we human beings coexist in a "global village" that was designed as a symbiotic whole, made purposefully for humanity? Yet, as King David asked in Psalm 8:4, what is man that God should be mindful of him?

It is difficult to persuade atheists that the precise settings of the universe that allow for life are designed, but a growing number of scientists have abandoned former agnosticism in the face of mounting evidence of the profound governance of time, space and matter, let alone the truly mystifying questions of origin.

There will always be those who refuse to acknowledge God's creation, but let us get out and smell the roses, appreciate the cows and pluck an occasional blade of grass. We need to take time to seriously contemplate the sheer wonder of it all. All nature is designed to support us human beings, but we are as yet only a work in progress. We must move on to perfection if we are ever going to dwell in the new heavens and new earth, which our Father in heaven planned long ago.

And oh yes, that beautiful woman I mentioned became my wife, and we learned together what family means and what our Father means by family. This involves all of us in the ultimate miracle, the first sensational part of which will be accomplished at our Lord's return. Send for or download our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* if you wish to learn more.

**George Carter** and his wife Chris raised four sons in Canada. He is an elder in the United Church of God in Kitchener, Ontario.

# One Leaf of Grass

by George Carter

*Fascination with a single blade of grass led to contemplating the wonder of it all.*

# The Millennium

From page 8

In the Millennium, we can give people additional comfort and encouragement not only in God's love for them, but also in the assurance that His Word is true. We will be living examples that someone else did it. Someone Jesus Christ died for made it. The same words that give us comfort now will still encourage people in the Millennium.

Who better to teach them to hold fast so that no one may take their crown? (See Revelation 3:11.) The numerous warnings to stand strong, endure to the end, keep the faith, grow in grace and knowledge, and love one another must still be taught.

At the end of the Millennium, when Satan is released, he will deceive vast multitudes of people, likened to the sand along the seashore in number (Revelation 20:7-10). During nearly a thousand years of godly rule, how often will we need to stir people up and warn them of the roaring lion that will seek to devour them? How will we help some avoid choosing to follow Satan and being deceived? The answer can be inferred by looking at ourselves today. Where are our weak points? Where do we need aid or encouragement? These same weaknesses will be present in people during the Millennium. We must endure to help teach others to do the same.

## Opportunity of an eternity

We have an opportunity beyond our lifetime—an opportunity of an eternity. The millennial period on earth will be just the beginning. Our role as kings and priests will mirror Jesus Christ's example. Our life in the Millennium will be eternal, yet we must still long to see many more sons and daughters come to glory. All people are potential sons and daughters in God's family. Both today and in the Millennium we must view their future potential and look beyond their shortcomings. We must live as examples now to be examples in the future. Our role in the Millennium is also our role today (compare 1 Peter 2:9).

Then and now, we must strive to live Jesus Christ's example of servant leadership. Our present life is to be a living sacrifice, acceptable to God (Romans 12:1). Then and now, the Bible is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16, New International Version). How well do we know and practice God's way now?

If we want to be a part of the Kingdom and be ready for our future roles as kings and priests in the family of God, we must first repent, be baptized and receive God's Spirit working in us so we can seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). If we are faithful in our lives now, we will be granted the opportunity to be faithful with much, much more in our future life.

Do you really want to be here to take on your role? Start living it today.

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**Peter Ekama** is a Master of Architecture graduate from the University of Cincinnati and attends the Canton, Ohio, congregation of the United Church of God.

# Modesty

From page 9

## Ladies, a few things to check:

- Is your chest area covered? Be cautious about cleavage. If needed, adapt a garment with a small swatch of fabric to make it modest.
- Are you showing midriff? Are your shorts too short? Is your skirt lingering far above the knee? If so, choose something longer. Likewise, if you have a nice skirt that is long enough while standing but rides up too high when you sit down, then carry a scarf or some other draping item with you to place over your legs while you are seated.
- Cover your shoulders or wear sleeveless tops with a wider strap as a means of showing respect at church services. Carry that scarf or a sweater with you for this purpose—besides, even on hot days overly air-conditioned buildings can be freezing!
- Check the fit of your sweaters, shirts, skirts, dresses and trousers—are they close fitting or skintight? Skintight clothes can be much too revealing. Stay in the middle range of fitted, semi-fitted and loose-fitted clothes.
- Do your clothes fit in general? If you have a bit of extra weight, don't try to squeeze into too small a size (see the point above). If you've *lost* weight, take the seams in so that you present yourself well.

## For gentlemen:

- Men need to watch the fit of clothes also. Pants and shirts that are far too tight are not appropriate!
- Check for shorts that gape or are too short. And be sure to wear clothes appropriate to the setting.
- On the other end of the spectrum, are trousers too baggy and underwear visible? Does this present a proper image for a follower of Christ? Hitch them up!

## For everyone:

- Do your clothes match? Are they clean? Torn? If so, take a few seconds to address the problem.
- Sit, stand, bend over, squat, turn, dance, walk and jump in front of the mirror. The coverage of clothes changes as you move. You may discover an angle that will gather the wrong kind of attention and needs to be fixed. Also, analyze how you walk and carry yourself. Are you smiling, standing up tall, and do you seem like someone who stands for God's way of life?

These may seem tedious and nitpicky, but we say a lot by the way we dress. It is possible to remain stylish and yet modest, and it's usually just a matter of a few inches of fabric rather than yards of coverage. Modest attire is one of the easiest ways of showing love for fellow human beings by helping them to obey God's commandments and keep their thoughts pure.

Take a stand for good taste, style and God's way of life—set a *modest* example!

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What's your vertical take on today's world? Check out ours.

# Commentaries

## From Our Website

Our website, VerticalThought.org, regularly publishes commentaries on current topics from young adults in God's Church that are relevant to the lives of young people today. Here's a sampling.

### There Are No "Cheats" in Life

by David Cobb

**POSTED** Dec. 15, 2006

**As a volunteer for Big Brothers Big Sisters, I have the opportunity each week to view life through the eyes of a fifth-grade boy. Abundant with lessons, this view of life is both joyful and sobering.**

In spring and summer, I leave the fifth-story office with wall-to-wall cubicles where I work and go to recess on the school playground. Aside from the occasional squabble over whose turn it is to kick the ball, that is pure joy. In the cold or wet months we often go to the computer lab. There is some joy in this room, but pure joy here is harder to come by.

One day my "little brother" wanted to use the Internet to find codes for a video game he plays at home. Gamers commonly refer to these codes as "cheats." According to videogamecritic.net, cheats are "special codes that allow you to bypass the normal limitations of a game." CheatCodes.com says that a cheat "gives you something secret or hidden that wouldn't have otherwise been available to you."

Sadly, we daily see evidence that many in society want to bypass the normal limitations of *life*.

- Studies conducted with high school students by the Center for Academic Integrity found "over 70% of respondents at public and parochial schools admitted to one or more instances of serious test cheating and over 60% admitted to some form of plagiarism" (academicintegrity.org).
- Statistics on marital infidelity vary widely because, not surprisingly, those who cheat on their spouses often do not respond to surveys truthfully. Most survey information indicates that 20 to 40 percent of men and 10 to 30 percent of women have been unfaithful at least once in their marriage.
- In 2005, the Economic Policy Institute reported that citizens and businesses owe \$353 billion in taxes to the U.S. government that were never paid. Understated earnings and overstated tax deductions—blatant cheating—are largely

responsible for the problem (epinet.org).

Linking the use of video game codes to the concept of cheating is, at best, misleading. Describing seemingly harmless fun as "cheats" offers acceptability to the idea of cheating—especially since, as they say, "It's only a game."

The adage "He that will cheat at play, will cheat you any way" expresses far more accurate reality. A person who will break the rules in a game will inevitably break the rules in life.

We develop the character of God by consistent obedience to His laws in every aspect of life. Playing by the rules ensures far more blessings than we could ever obtain by cheating. God's Word constantly proclaims the principle, "Wealth gained by dishonesty [the easy, "cheats" way] will be diminished, but he who gathers by labor [honest effort] will increase" (Proverbs 13:11).

Cheating is a form of stealing and also of coveting—wanting what is not rightfully yours—which invariably leads to more sin. [Of course, it should be noted that looking up some codes to get to the next level of mere diversionary solo play doesn't necessarily indicate a character problem. But if it's done in play against others or part of a broader approach to personally meeting challenges, that would indeed be a problem.]

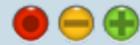
American entertainer and thinker Pearl Bailey once said, "The first and worst of all frauds is to cheat one's self. All sin is easy after that." The ancient Greek dramatist Sophocles also expressed a far better outlook on life. He said, "I would prefer even to fail with honor than to win by cheating."

Ask God for help to resist the temptation to get ahead by cheating. Choose the true blessings that He offers by living honestly. Remember, there are no "cheats" in life.

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# [S]INDIGESTION



by Corbin Rose

POSTED Aug. 3, 2007

**sindigestion** (sin-di-gest'chen, n.) *An uncomfortable condition due to difficulty or an inability to process or digest things not fit for healthy spiritual digestion.*

You roll over in bed, still sick to your stomach, hoping the pain will soon subside. You've already tried to curl up into the smallest possible ball to alleviate the discomfort, but you just can't bend any further. Groaning, you realize that your decision to eat the moldy pizza and two cans of Cheese Whiz may not have been the best idea after all! Yes, you've got indigestion, and it's definitely not fun.

Much like the feeling of indigestion, we are susceptible to the negative consequences of bad choices we make in our lives. We could call it "sindigestion"—the unsettling state we find ourselves in when we ingest too much of this present evil world's influence. When we allow too much negativity into our minds or focus too much on our own selfish interests, we can become spiritually ill.

God designed us to be happy and healthy if we take in the right kind of things. But when we dump garbage into our bodies and minds, we simply won't function at 100 percent.

We all have some spiritual sindigestion in our lives. As with indigestion, our spiritual ailment can come from many sources, like overindulging on spiritual junk food, bad films or violent video games. Here's how to be sindigestion-free over the long haul:

- *Maintain a steady diet of positive food for thought.* Focus on the good things in life. Limit or tune out the negative, sinful ideas and examples so rampant in our media and society. Sin clogs us up inside and makes us sick. Just as we endeavor to avoid junk foods and eat healthy foods, we should reject negative thinking and focus our minds on true and noble thoughts. Develop a desire for what is good and upright, rather than for what seems popular and entertaining yet is sinful (Philippians 4:8).
- *Stay active in your godly behavior.* Once you've limited your negative intake, internalize the positive things of God by acting on them in your life. Our physical bodies need good food *and* exercise to burn off the negative junk inside us. True spiritual health demands that we be doers of God's Word, not just hearers (James 1:22).
- *Rest, recuperate, repeat.* One of the most common remedies for sickness is rest. Our bodies need a break from all this processing to regenerate.

Thankfully, God has built in a day each week for us to rest so we can stay spiritually healthy. While we rest, our bodies and minds rejuvenate so we can be in top shape, free of sindigestion, ready to start the cycle over again. God made us and knows that we need this resting period—the Sabbath was made *for* mankind! (Mark 2:27).

Each step builds spiritual health. But even if you try to tune out the negative, there is that yucky (yes, yucky!), sinful nature within that can still make you



**God designed us to be happy and healthy if we take in the right kind of things. But when we dump garbage into our bodies and minds, we simply won't function at 100 percent.**

sick. To beat sindigestion, actively replace the wrong mind-set with things from above—the things of God! To learn more about how to live a healthy and happy life, request or download our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* from [www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets) today!

The ultimate Doctor is in, and He is waiting to see you.

**Corbin Rose**, a graduate of Ambassador Bible Center, now works as contract graphic designer in California and in Michigan, where he attends the United Church of God.

# Twitter to Jesus: What Are You Doing?



by Hansel New

**POSTED** June 12, 2009

## If Jesus tweeted, would we follow?

Some may ask: What, pray tell, is a tweet? Tweets are the short, frequent text-based messages posted through the social network called Twitter, all answering the same question: *What are you doing?*

More and more people are becoming “twitterpated,” so to speak. In fact, Twitter’s popularity is growing so quickly it recently ranked as the third most used social network after Facebook and MySpace, according to a February 2009 blog entry on the tracking site Compete.com.

### Jesus tweet

So imagine if Jesus used Twitter and we could ask Him: *What are you doing?* What would His tweets tell us?

Think about it. We like to stay up-to-the-minute current on our friends and family, so why not the Messiah we yearn to follow and worship? Shouldn’t we as His followers want to know at least some of the things He’s doing—at this very moment?

### Not now, I’m shepherding

We can know—at least to some small degree—what Jesus is doing. He tells us Himself in the pages of the Bible. At any given moment, Christ is shepherding, among other things.

In the book of John, chapter 10 describes Christ’s role as our Good Shepherd. Yawn, you may think. Shepherds are stereotyped as standing with staff in hand and, well, not doing much of anything else.

Not so! Remember that in first-century culture when Christ walked the grassy slopes of the land of Israel, sheep were highly prized for their wool, milk and meat, so protecting them was of utmost importance. Think of shepherds in that era as being in the asset-protection or wealth-management business.

Now, understanding the importance of shepherds, read John 10—it’s not that long! The Good Shepherd does the following things:

- *Enters* by the gate (He’s the real deal, not a sheep rustler).
- *Calls* His sheep by name (He knows them as individuals).
- *Leads* them out to pasture (provides for them).
- *Goes ahead* of them (leads the way).
- *Lays down His life* for the sheep (puts their needs ahead of His own).

Notice all the action phrases! Jesus Christ is decidedly *not* just hanging out in heaven somewhere while people are searching for real leadership in our confused and restless world.

He’s busy leading, guiding and caring for His flock as the Good Shepherd.

To better grasp what Jesus is doing, check out the chapter titled “The Messiah’s Misunderstood Mission” in our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

### Twitter to the future

Our job is to follow Christ, but few seem to know where we are ultimately headed. Enter the Twitter question, but this time ask our Good Shepherd in the future sense: *What are you going to do?*

Prophecies throughout the Bible tell us that eventually Christ will shepherd the whole world when He dons a crown in His future role as ruler of the Kingdom of God—right here on earth. We can have a wonderful part in that Kingdom if we follow the Shepherd and prepare now.

What are *you* doing?

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Jesus Christ is decidedly **not just hanging out in heaven** somewhere while people are searching for real leadership in our confused and restless world.

# Don't Step Over That Fence ...



by Renee Schofield

POSTED July 20, 2007

**Imagine standing on the edge of a cliff, with the most amazing natural vista you have ever seen before you—rolling valleys full of luscious green Australian bush, a waterfall running down the rocky cliff and a flowing river down below.**

Sounds beautiful, right? But imagine there is this fence keeping you back from the edge and stopping you from really getting a good look. If I just step over the fence for only a minute, I would be able to see the waterfall a little bit better . . .

Do you feel fenced in by your parents' rules and by God's laws? Do you want to jump the fence and go play out in that big wide world—to go have some "fun," just for a bit? Do you want to take a small step over the fence on the edge of the cliff to get a better view of the gorgeous scenery?

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are trying to do the right thing, but sometimes life just seems so restricting. It can feel like we're stuck inside this fenced-in section with all of God's rules, while all that "fun stuff" is happening out there over the fence.

Well, the reality is just the opposite!

God does have fences—but not in the way we sometimes feel. He has given us choice and freedom and doesn't restrict us by putting up a fence around the way He wants us to go. He *has*, however, put up fences around some dangerous areas that are wrong, hurtful and destructive for us. He clearly shows us through His Word what isn't constructive to living a good and happy life.

We need to learn to identify the areas God has

fenced off to protect us. God lets us see what's inside those areas, but He has built for us good fences—His laws—to show us which direction we should go.

God isn't harsh. He wants us to know what is out there, and He gives us the tools to recognize those areas of concern. He doesn't stop us from making our own decisions.

So what happens if you make a mistake by going into a fenced-off area and then realize that it was a wrong decision? Don't worry—God is good. At the price of Jesus Christ's life, He built a gate for you to open and get back out! God promises to forgive us when we walk back through that gate and repent.

So, how would I summarize this in 30 words or less?

- Know that God has put up fences around dangerous areas of life—not to limit us but to protect us.
- Recognize those fences by studying His guide—the Bible.

"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-17).

Living God's way of life isn't restrictive. It's about making the right choices and living a wonderful, happy, carefree life. Just don't step over that fence on the edge of the cliff. The fence is there for a reason!

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## VT Commentaries: *Serving up our approach to:*

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# Religious Debate vs. Dialogue

**W**alking through the campus main quad on the way to teaching my seminar on Exploring Religious Diversity, I notice that the very vocal man has returned with his large picket sign that reads, “All Sinners Will Burn FOREVER in Hellfire!”

His fervent chanting of Scripture and attempts to start heated conversations with students passing by make me wonder what truly motivates his actions. Whatever is driving him, his debating tactics are not working.

Reaching my classroom, I look around at the faces of the 20 undergraduate college students who come from a variety of religious backgrounds, majors, class years and lifestyles. After engaging in dialogue with this group week after week, the thing I admire most about my students is their ability to genuinely discuss their faith and beliefs.

Instead of just arguing about why their beliefs and practices are right while others are wrong, they are able to connect across many different ideologies and perspectives because of their desire to engage in authentic dialogue on what matters most to them.

There is a clear difference between these two approaches to communicating one’s faith—debate versus dialogue—and they have drastically different outcomes. In the first scenario, the man with the sign is not well received by his audience, and his message isn’t heard or appreciated. Alternatively, in my classroom, students are able to build bridges of understanding across significant differences as they interact in intergroup dialogue.

Both examples beg an important question about communicating biblical truth on college campuses today: *In a world of increasingly divergent views and beliefs, what is the best way to be heard?*

Christian college students today can learn and practice techniques of dialogue when discussing with one another their different beliefs and practices. God instructs us to always be ready to explain to others the eternal hope that He promises with a spirit of gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). The Bible also instructs us to live out our faith as a witness to God’s truth in all environments (Isaiah 43:10; Romans 8:16). Let’s look at two personal examples.

## Raising awareness

Jonathan had started studying his Bible more in college and had recently begun to observe the Sabbath weekly, along with keeping the biblical annual festivals.

His parents, his close family friends and his roommates don’t believe in the Bible or have any religious background, so this transition has been rocky for Jonathan as he navigates life in college. As his support system, they are excited to see Jonathan’s newfound zeal and passion, and they grow

curious about his new practices and what they really mean. People begin to question him more and more.

As Jonathan’s life is defined more and more by his faith, he’s had the opportunity to explain to others why he is now not working on Friday nights and Saturdays with his supervisor and coworkers at the Campus Recreation Center. When home for spring break, he discussed the purpose of the Sabbath with his mom, and he began telling her about the upcoming spring Holy Days he was preparing to observe.

As followers of Jesus we are called to live our faith as an example to others, not engage in fruitless debates with people who may not even listen to us.



His excitement and conviction for his faith is evident to his mom and others he connects with. Even if they don’t fully understand or agree with his beliefs and practices, they can’t help but notice the change in Jonathan for the better.

Jonathan’s example may be similar to your own in some ways. Maybe friends or professors on campus don’t fully understand why you choose not to go out on Friday nights or why you stop eating bagels and sandwiches around Passover. By taking the time to explain your beliefs through engaging in a two-way dialogue and having supporting biblical evidence for your practices, you have the opportunity to raise awareness about what the Bible teaches, just like Jonathan.

## Providing comfort

Cecilia came home from church one Sabbath to find her

roommate, Jessica, crying at the kitchen table in their apartment. Jessica revealed that her father had just been diagnosed with stage-three lymphoma and that the prognosis didn't look hopeful. As a devout Catholic, Jessica was not only fervently praying for her father's healing, but she was also concerned that he would not go to heaven if he passed away because he had stopped coming to church years ago after his own father had died.

Listening to Jessica's concerns, Cecilia sat down beside her, opened her Bible to a familiar verse, and began reading aloud Psalm 23: "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...*" She read on until Jessica's sobs quieted and a sense of peace filled the room. By reciting a familiar passage they both knew and believed, Cecilia was able to provide comfort to her friend in a time of need, while connecting on a deeper, spiritual level.

This situation also allowed Cecilia to share her beliefs regarding the biblical teachings on the afterlife. She explained to Jessica that God desires a deep and lasting relationship with each person, and that this life is not the only time for salvation and judgment.

Coming from a different religious background, this teaching was new for Jessica, and she was interested to learn more, both out of love for her father and her own curiosity. While we must be careful when and with whom we share God's truth and be cognizant of how it may be received (Matthew 7:6), Jessica's example shows that there are circumstances when we should explain the hope that lies within us—when people are receptive to learning about biblical teachings, particularly if they show genuine interest and ask.

## The principles of dialogue

You can apply the principles below as you learn and practice how to dialogue with others as you discuss your faith:

*Listen and communicate with a spirit of understanding:* In dialogue, one listens to the other side in order to understand, find meaning and find agreement. In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments. While explaining your beliefs, also be attentive to hearing what the other person believes. (This is not to say that there should never be respectful debate at some point.)

*Seek common ground:* In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements. In debate, one searches for glaring differences. Start by highlighting beliefs and practices that you both share and then build on this foundation.

*Grow in personal awareness:* Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position. Debate causes critique of the other position. Engaging in conversations about our faith allows us to strengthen our own convictions and beliefs.

These principles show that dialogue involves a two-way conversation that is collaborative and seeks to develop deeper understanding through respectful communication and personal introspection. Far too often, conversations about religion turn into heated debates that have a distinct winner and loser, and no one gets ahead. Relationships are bruised, feelings are hurt, and neither side feels understood or valued.

As true followers of Jesus Christ who seek to live His way of life in today's society, we need to live out our faith daily as godly examples and share the hope that lies within us, not engage in debates over truth with people who aren't ready or willing to listen.

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## Connecting Across Lines of Faith

**Here's what other students and recent college graduates had to say when asked, "How do/did you connect with others and discuss your faith on campus?"**

"I used my classmates' questions about where I had been when I was away observing the Holy Days to explain my religious observances and what they meant to me. Since university students come from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds, I was almost always met with positive responses about my beliefs, and sometimes I would find myself in deep conversations, explaining my faith to other Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, agnostics, atheists, etc. It was a great opportunity to relate a little of the gospel to others and to learn more about how their beliefs shaped their lives as well."

**College graduate, Wisconsin**

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"I try to model godly behavior in class and at campus events, and I always use the proper terminology when referring to my spiritual beliefs (e.g., the Feast of Tabernacles, second tithe or the Kingdom of God). Periodically, classmates or coworkers will become curious and ask about my beliefs. I patiently wait for this moment to explain, because it is not until then that they will actually hear my answer."

**Current graduate student, Illinois**

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"I have connected with others of different faiths by learning the vocabulary for having a productive conversation about faith instead of an argument, by participating in service projects with people from other faith traditions, and by learning to ask questions instead of passing judgment on others or making brash statements about my own faith."

**Current graduate student, Illinois**

## Extra! Extra! Read All About It... on Your iPad



Newspapers have been available online for several years, but the happy days of free access to news and magazine articles on the Internet seems to be drawing to a close. Newspapers printed on paper were not free, so free Internet news isn't a reasonable alternative. News is big business, and it must have an outlet for making income.

Recently it was announced that Rupert Murdoch, head of News Corp. (which owns many newspapers), and Steve Jobs, head of Apple, have created an e-reader-friendly newspaper called *The Daily*. It will be the world's first all-digital, subscription-only newspaper without a print or Web edition (Edward Helmore, "Rupert Murdoch Creates 'iNewspaper'—With the Help of Steve Jobs," *Guardian.co.uk*, Nov. 21, 2010).

"When one goes, they all go," as the saying goes. If *The Daily* is successful, it's likely that more newspapers will follow Murdoch's lead.

# 7-11 p.m.

Hours during which the bulk of iPad reading occurs.

—from Read It Later Web service data, cited by Kit Eaton, "iPad Reading Could Cut Into TV's Time," *CNN.com*, Jan. 17, 2011

## Too Much Social Networking?

Facebook we know, but what about Tumblr.com, Last.fm, Fetch, Digg, Twitter, LinkedIn, Foursquare and on and on the list goes? The question: What is essential social networking, and what is too much?

Researchers at the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project have determined that many people have a saturation point with technology. They finally get to a place



where they just aren't interested in adding more and more to their digital lives (Monica Hesse, "Keeping Up With Social Networking Sites: How Much Is Enough?" *WashingtonPost.com*, Oct. 19, 2010).

How do you know if you have reached that point? Estimate how much time you spend on Facebook, Twitter, etc., and add up the number of times you interrupt other activities to check these sites. Do you spend multiple hours on the Internet? Do you constantly check your phone or computer for updates? If so, it's probably time to cut back on social networking. Technology should add to your life, but it should not be an addiction.

## Excuse My Accent: Language Skills

A study by the University of Manchester in England and Radboud University in the Netherlands found that people automatically try to mimic the accent of another person. This is especially pronounced when one of the individuals has a strong foreign or regional accent. The individual with the less obvious accent will naturally try to mimic the stronger one.

A study with volunteers found that when

the person with the weaker accent in the conversation tried to mimic the other, he or she was better able to understand the heavier accent (Richard Alleyne, "Mimicking a Foreign Accent Helps You Communicate," *Telegraph.co.uk*, Dec. 7, 2010).

So does this mean we can go around sounding like bad actors with funny accents? Probably not, but keeping an ear open for changing tones and pronunciations will help you understand others better. And we could all do with better communication!



## Creation Case Study: Cats

Recent research from MIT, Virginia Tech and Princeton University analyzed the way cats lap up liquids using only their small, scratchy tongues. They concluded that it involves a process that balances two forces, gravity and inertia. The tip of the tongue rapidly skims the surface, which draws a column of liquid into the cat's mouth. The cat then snaps its mouth shut and captures the drink.

Timing is so critical to the process that without an established rhythm cats wouldn't be able to drink. Domestic cats manage about four laps per second, and each lap brings 0.1 milliliters of liquid into the mouth. Bigger cats have a slower rate of lapping in order to balance gravity and inertia with their size (Richard Alleyne, "How Cats Drink Milk Without Getting Their Chins Wet," *Telegraph.co.uk*, Nov. 11, 2010).



## Archaeology, Biology and Megiddo

Research at the site of Tel Megiddo in Israel, famous in the New Testament as Armageddon, is being done by a combination of archaeologists and scientists—specifically chemists

and biologists. Having on-site scientific labs and equipment will ideally allow archaeologists to more rapidly analyze what is contained in the layers that have built up over the centuries and identify where each layer fits in the time line.

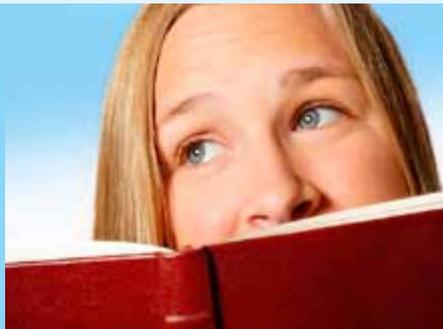
Among academics, two theories surround the site. One purports that it was once a powerful administrative and military center during the time of King David and King Solomon in the 11th and 10th centuries B.C., as the Bible indicates. The opposing theory says that this was not so, and that David and Solomon really didn't have much of an empire. Those with this view claim that Megiddo flourished at a later date under another empire (Haim Watzman, "Chemists Help Archaeologists to Probe Biblical History," Nature.com, Nov. 30, 2010).

If you believe God and that He inspired the Bible, then the Bible provides your starting point in analyzing history. Science alone won't completely answer the questions of history. Scientific research—if done properly—can be useful in establishing historical details, but it is also possible to come to a wrong conclusion.

## Wait! There's More ...

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



## Don't Let Your Mind Wander

Psychologists at Harvard University found that the human mind wanders almost half of the time, especially when we are resting, using the computer or working. However, exercising or intense conversations tend to occupy the moment and keep us from daydreaming. They believe this is one reason people are so interested in sports, clubs and opportunities to congregate with friends.

However, findings show that a wandering mind isn't necessarily a happy one. Psychologists believe that people are happiest living in the moment and not dwelling on the past (Richard Alleyne, "Why Our Wandering Minds Are Making Us Miserable," Telegraph.co.uk, Nov. 11, 2010).

## Song of the Stars

We know they shine at night, but did you know that stars sing?

According to recent research by astrophysicists from the University of Birmingham, stars vibrate as a result of earthquake-like seismic activity that reverberates in flickers of light across the galaxies. Scientists compared the light flickers/vibrations coming from a star named KIC 11026764 to those coming from a musical instrument, and they reconstructed the "sounds" by using a technique called astroseismology.

The sound created is similar to wind blowing against a microphone and helps scientists analyze the structure of the star. Another star recently recorded by Sheffield University is our sun. It, too, produces harmony-like musical tones. Larger stars vibrate at lower frequencies than smaller stars, and musical instruments function similarly (Richard Gray, "Star's Song Captured by Scientists," Telegraph.co.uk, Nov. 7, 2010).

In the Bible, Romans 1:20 says, "God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (New International Version). God created music and the ability to make and perceive it, so it should be no surprise that His creation hums with musical qualities!



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