

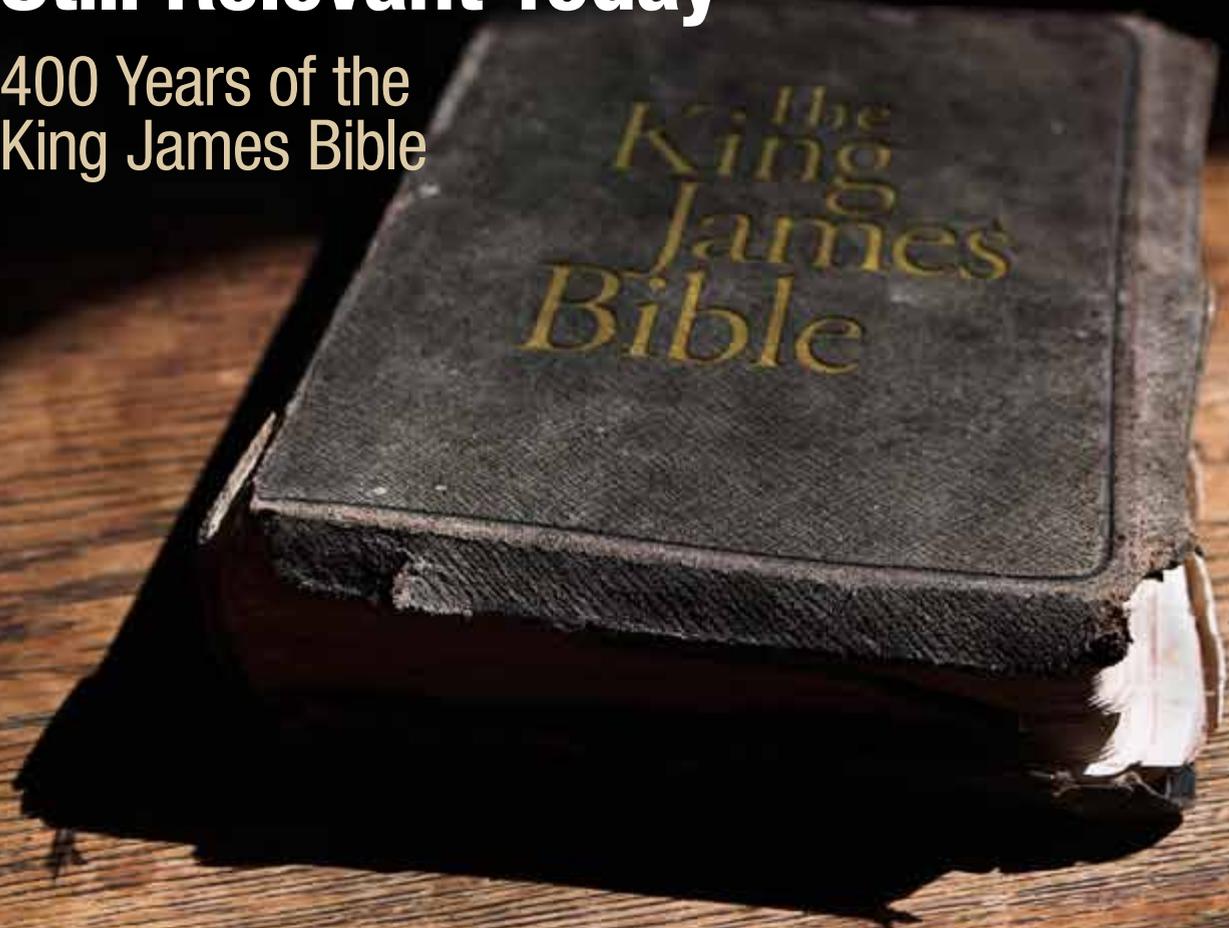
January-March 2011

Verticalthought®

a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's leaders

Ancient Wisdom Still Relevant Today

400 Years of the
King James Bible



**How the Bible
Was Written**

**Is the Bible Relevant
in the 21st Century?**

**Porn Causes
Brain Damage**

**A Life Without
Regrets?**

If You Had Only One Book ...

If you were stranded on a desert island and could have only one book to read, what would it be? Other than one on how to survive on a desert island or how to get off a desert island, what would you choose?

Curious, I perused an online discussion of this very question. As one would expect, there was a variety of opinions. Amazingly, not a single person selected the Bible even though it is “by far the best-selling book of all time” (Russell Ash, *The Top 10 of Everything*, p. 112).

Ironically, people buy Bibles, but apparently they don’t read them. At least that’s what seems to be the case according to a recent survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. The average respondent to this survey correctly answered only half of the 32 questions about the Bible and other aspects of religion. (Ironically, atheists scored higher than Christians!)

This year is a significant year in the history of the Bible. Exactly 400 years ago in 1611, the King James Version became available to English-speaking people. In the ensuing years this translation has had an enormous impact on Western nations. But will the average person even be aware of this historical milestone? Be sure to read the article “Your Bible Is 400 Years Old” for more details.

So let’s say you selected the Bible as your book to read while stranded on a desert island. What are some of its key points?

Jesus, the Son of God, said that God’s words, which are recorded for us in the Bible, are truth (John 17:17). Put another way, we can be absolutely sure that whatever God says is accurate. If He says something will come to pass, *it will*. When He explains how to have good relationships with others, what He reveals *works*.

In addition to explaining what God is doing and

how we can live better lives, God’s Word reveals our spiritual potential to become part of His eternal family. As John 1:12 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” And of even more sobering significance, each of us will be judged by what is written in the Bible (Revelation 20:12).

Recognizing these principles, Paul told Timothy that the Holy Scriptures are “able to make you wise for salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15). Why? Because, as Paul continued, “all Scripture is given by inspiration

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of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (verses 16-17).

As beneficial and important as the Bible is, it is of no value unless one reads it and applies its timeless instructions. In this issue we draw your attention to the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible and highlight this book’s continuing relevance. We hope it will inspire you to be like the people of Berea who “received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

VerticalThought

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The King James Bible is 400 Years Old

The King James Version, or Authorized Version, of the Bible was completed in 1611. Even if you have a more modern English version, it owes a great deal to this groundbreaking translation.

by Randy Stiver

The King James Bible is like a laptop database full of divine truth, moral teaching, superior insight and phenomenal stories of mankind's quest to know God. And for being 400 years old, it still looks pretty good! I'll bet most other laptops won't last a tiny fraction of that time—nor will they offer you eternal life!

May 2, 2011, marks the 400th anniversary of this remarkable English translation of the Holy Scriptures. Under the auspices of King James I of England, a highly qualified English-speaking team of Bible scholars invested four vigorous years translating the amazingly famous King James (or Authorized) Version of the Bible. Upon its completion and mass duplication via the printing press, the common people could read God's Word in the common language of the realm.

Acts of faith, persecution, determination, miracles and martyrdom unfold in the remarkable story of how the Bible that you hold—or could hold—on your lap came to be. The impact of the King James translation vibrantly affects our world even today.

The Bible before English

A long, long time ago in a region far, far away (unless you live in the Middle East), God motivated some 40 men over a span of about 15 centuries to write His divine Word. That's a miracle! Although each wrote in his own style, the words were "given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Moses, in the mid-1400s B.C., began writing the Old Testament in the Hebrew language with the book of

Genesis. By A.D. 100, John the apostle concluded the New Testament, preserved in Greek, with the great prophetic book of Revelation. All told, there are 66 books that make up our modern Bible (some Old Testament books were in ancient times combined, so the original total would have been 49). The word *Bible* itself comes from the Greek word *biblia*, meaning "books."

Only those who knew Hebrew or Greek could read Scripture until a Latin translation was completed around A.D. 400. That stood as the official version for 1,000 years in Europe and North Africa. As time went by, few average people could read Latin. And the dominant, traditional Christian leadership tightly controlled the common man's access to the written Bible, effectively preventing him from reading it. Obviously, the religious authorities at that time had serious control issues!

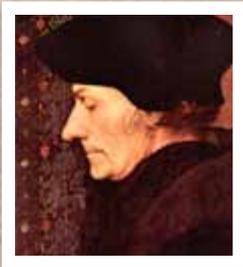
Translation trouble

Among the few early translations to a common language (other than Latin or Greek), we find the Anglo-Saxon Gospels (only four books of the New Testament) in A.D. 995. Later, there were French and Spanish translations used by the often bilingual English nobility. Otherwise, it was Latin or nothing—only the priests could tell or interpret what was in the Scriptures, especially for the masses of common folk.

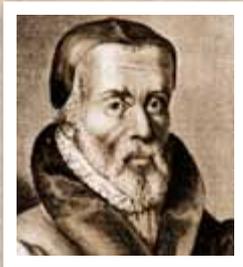
Historically, the Anglo-Saxon love of freedom has taken on legendary status, and that sense of liberty stirred interest in an English translation in the 1380s. John Wycliffe, an English theologian, pub-



John Wycliffe



Desiderius Erasmus



William Tyndale



Martin Luther



James I of England

lished hand-copied volumes of his own English translation of the Latin Bible. A brilliant man at odds with the established church, Wycliffe was eventually declared a heretic due to his translation and publication of the Scriptures in the common English. So angry was the religious establishment that leaders of the Catholic Church in Rome ordered his bones exhumed and burned in 1428—some 40 years after his death!

By the mid-1400s, the Gutenberg printing press was invented, revolutionizing the manufacture and availability of all books, but especially the Bible. One early customer was Desiderius Erasmus, a Dutch scholar and expert in Greek. From early manuscripts, he assembled a more accurate copy of the New Testament in Greek than the official Latin version used by the Roman church. His work (published in 1516) is known as the *Textus Receptus*, that is, the “Received Text,” from which the New Testament in the King James Bible was later translated.

Acts of faith, persecution, miracles and martyrdom unfold in the remarkable story of how the Bible came to be.

The Reformation

The movement away from the pope’s complete religious domination of traditional Christianity was gaining momentum around this time. One year later, in 1517, Martin Luther effectively launched a protest against a number of Roman Catholic doctrines and practices, hence the term *Protestant*.

Luther translated the Bible into German, and a brilliant and brave British theologian named William Tyndale translated the New Testament from Erasmus’ Greek *Textus Receptus* into English. In 1526, Tyndale, too, made use of the printing revolution. The Roman church leaders in England were so enraged at Tyndale for publishing his translation that he was forced to do most of his work in seclusion in Germany or Holland.

Historians call William Tyndale “the architect of the English language,” largely because of the beauty and accuracy of his Bible translation. Hard as it might be to believe, considering

the shallow, secular-mindedness of our godless century, the Bible profoundly shaped the language, culture and history of the English-speaking nations!

Educated at Oxford College and fluent in eight languages, Mr. Tyndale produced such a fine translation of the Bible that a significant portion of his wording was carried over into the King James Version. But he translated at the ultimate cost.

Renowned for later precipitating the Protestant Reformation in England, King Henry VIII supported the pope during his early reign. Sadly, both the king’s operatives and Roman church agents hunted down and imprisoned Tyndale. After 500 days in deplorable conditions, followed by a sham trial, the great English Bible translator was strangled and burned at the stake in 1536.

Countdown to King James

During the next 75 years leading to the publication of the King James Version, movement toward increasing Anglo-Saxon freedom struggled, took root and finally bloomed under Queen Elizabeth I. During that period, the Bible could be read and appreciated by the common man through Tyndale’s translation—if the commoner could obtain a copy. However, the process of putting a Bible into the hand of every man would need another boost—and would bring more drama.

At Elizabeth’s death, her second cousin King James VI of Scotland was crowned King James I of England and Ireland in 1603. The next year, he hosted the famous Hampton Court Conference of religious leaders to hear the Puritans’ reasons for opposing the corrupted Latin Bible. As king, he then decreed that a new translation of the Scriptures should be made.

Control issues resurfaced with a violent vengeance in 1605. Roman church supporters attempted a bloody coup d’etat by hiding a massive stockpile of gunpowder in the basement of the House of Commons, intending to blow up James and the entire British government when the king came to address Parliament. Divine intervention prevailed. The Gunpowder Plot was discovered and defused.

James involved himself in the translation process by organizing highly esteemed teams of Greek, Hebrew and Bible scholars based at the education centers of Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster in 1607. After four years of systematic and carefully reviewed translation, the Authorized King James Version of the entire Bible was finalized for publication in 1611.

How the Bible Was Written

The Bible is a unique book in the annals of history. Not only is it one of the most accurately and thoroughly preserved books of antiquity, it also stands alone as a record of God's instruction for subsequent generations on how to live.

In his Bible history classic, *All About the Bible*, Sidney Collett writes that the Bible was written "over a period of about 1600 years" (between 1500 B.C. and A.D. 100) by about "forty persons, in all stations of life" (20th ed., p. 11). Critics say this compromises the integrity of the Bible—that a book written over that long a period and by that many people couldn't be an inspired book directed by God. But is this the case? The Bible would have to be inspired by

God to be taken seriously.

There is one very important commonality in the writing of the Bible, and that commonality is God's hand. Even though the writers were kings, statesmen, herdsmen, fishermen, farmers, priests, prophets, a physician, a rabbi, a tax collector and more, the entire work does not contradict itself. Its theme—God's plan for mankind—is consistent from beginning to end. The Bible is not simply a collection of different writers, for "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). The apostle Paul also noted that the Bible contains the oracles—the sayings and teachings—of God (Romans 3:2).

For further reading, we encourage you to access other booklets and articles written to address the truth of the Bible at www.ucg.org:

Is the Bible True? www.GNmagazine.org/booklets/BT/BT.pdf

How to Understand the Bible, www.GNmagazine.org/booklets/UB/UB.pdf

The Bible and Archaeology, Sections 1-12 (www.GNmagazine.org/booklets/BA1/BA1.pdf) and Sections 13-24 (www.GNmagazine.org/booklets/BA2/BA2.pdf)

"Has the Bible Been Preserved Accurately?" www.ucg.org/reprints/pdf/BiblePreservedAccurately.pdf

—Dan Dowd

The power of the King James translation

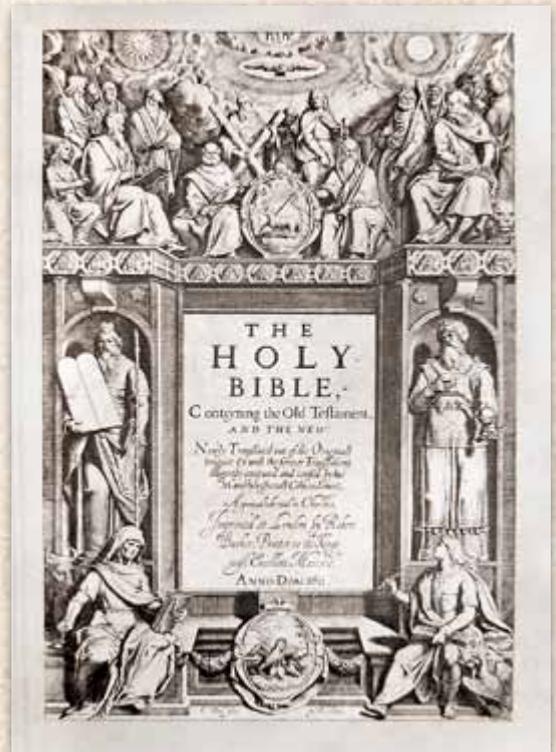
The resonant tones of the new translation drew greatly from giants of biblical scholarship like William Tyndale and several earlier English translators. Combined with advances in Greek and Hebrew scholarship and the considerable knowledge base of the King James translation team, an accurate and almost timelessly readable English Bible was produced. In the vernacular, this translation had "legs"—it would be the Bible to convey God's Word throughout the English-speaking world with huge ramifications to modern history.

It was soon carried into the early American colonies and, as the Authorized Version, became the Bible for all the British Empire.

The constant presence of the 1611 translation unified the moral core, though imperfectly, of the Anglo-Saxon populations worldwide. It consolidated both the spoken and written language and attendant culture that paved the way for an unparalleled English-speaking role in world events for the following 400 years.

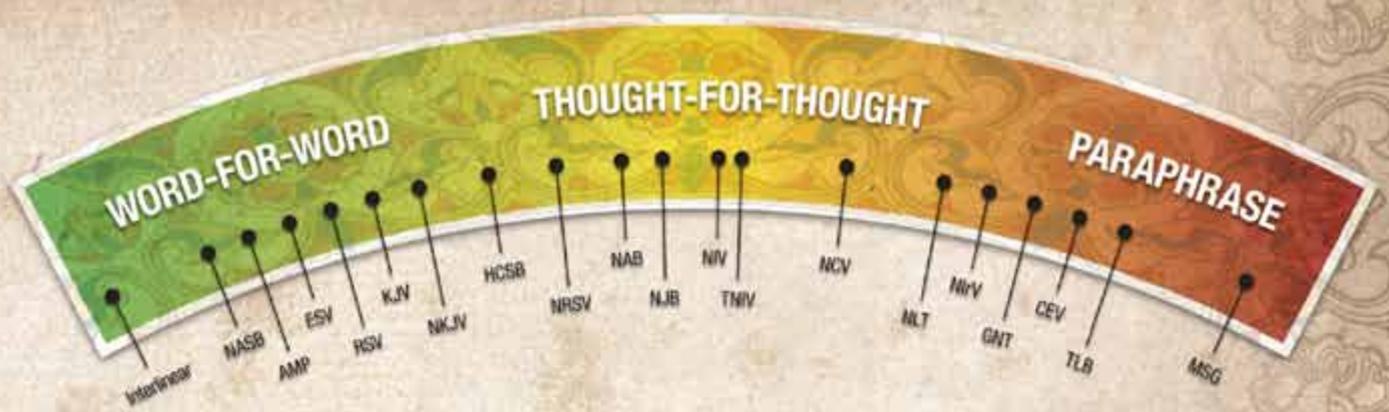
Translate this

The British and American peoples took the Scriptures—made readily readable to them in the King James Bible—seriously. This Bible instructed English justice for all the nations it governed during the heyday of the British Empire. A King James Version-reading public generated American constitutional law. As a testament to both God's Word and this translation, Americans posted the Ten



Commandments in schools, courthouses and other government buildings.

Britain and the United States became the two great democracies that have dominated and influenced the world dramatically since 1800—and have offered opportunity and freedom to people around the globe. Although not fully comprehended by those who offered it, the divine law studied in the



NASB New American Standard Bible	NKJV New King James Version	NIV New International Version	GNT Good News Translation (also Good News Bible)
AMP Amplified Bible	HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible	TNIV Today's New International Version	CEV Contemporary English Version
ESV English Standard Version	NRSV New Revised Standard Version	NCV New Century Version	TLB The Living Bible
RSV Revised Standard Version	NAB New American Bible	NLT New Living Translation	MSG The Message
KJV King James Version	NJB New Jerusalem Bible	Nirv New International Reader's Version	

Types of Bible Translations

"Of making many books there is no end." So said Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:12. We could take Solomon's statement and extend it to Bible translations. Go into any good bookstore and you can easily be overwhelmed with dozens and dozens of Bible translations from which to choose. Which one do you choose to study God's Word and learn His way?

There are three main types of Bible translations: word-for-word, thought-for-thought and paraphrase. A word-for-word translation attempts to translate each Hebrew or Greek word into a corresponding English word. However, some consider a word-for-word translation harder to understand, particularly when it comes to figures of speech that are not used in modern culture. Two examples of word-for-word translations

are the King James Version and the New King James Version.

The thought-for-thought translations seek to express the meaning of each sentence or paragraph from the original language in simple up-to-date English without being tied to translating every word. As such, these types of translations should not be exclusively relied on for doctrinal study. The New International Version is perhaps the most well-known of the thought-for-thought translations.

A paraphrased translation has the primary goal of conveying the Bible in a simple, easy-to-understand language without regard to word-for-word or even thought-for-thought expressions of the original languages. The authors often exercise "poetic license,"

leaving great room for personal religious ideas.

The United Church of God, which publishes *Vertical Thought*, uses the New King James Version as its standard English-language translation. We recommend this as a good all-around translation for everyday use. Thought-for-thought translations can be good secondary sources for simply reading God's Word or for rounding out an understanding of Scripture. The truth is, all Bible translations contain some human error, so it's best to use several versions in study.

For more information on this topic, read the online article "Which Bible Translation Should I Use?" at www.ucg.org/reprints/pdf/WhichBible.pdf

—Dan Dowd

King James Bible spawned that freedom. Atheism had nothing to do with this prophesied national greatness of Britain and America. It was from God Himself.

However, God foresaw and recorded the deep trouble that the English-speaking nations now face precisely because they ignore and violate the truth of His way of giving, sharing and caring taught in the same Bible. Request or download your personal copy of the free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* at www.GNmagazine.org/booklets so you can better understand the biblical proportions of what God said.

Finally, although your Bible (if you speak English) is 400 years old in 2011—and the Bible itself is, of course, far older than *that*—it's eternally new! Now it's your turn to translate the Holy Scriptures into faith and action in your life. Jesus said that you—and He meant *you*—shall know the truth, and the truth of the Bible shall make you free (John 8:32). Read it, learn it, love it and love the great God who inspired it!

Randy Stiver is the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Columbus and Cambridge, Ohio.

Is the Bible Still Relevant In the 21st Century?

In this modern world, is this old, old book worth reading?

I don't think our parents ever really saw our generation coming. They grew up in a world where people stretched a dollar as far as they could, and when something ripped, they put a patch on it and kept going. Most of *their* parents or grandparents remember living through the Great Depression, where just having anything, no matter how old, was a big deal.

by Jeremy Lallier

The pace of change

But us? We're a different breed. We tear through technology and clothes like bags of potato chips. A five-year-old computer may as well be an ancient pottery shard. While you were busy blinking, everything owned by everyone else just got sleeker, faster and more expensive. Most cell phones today could outperform the first computer I ever remember using.

It was my family's old Packard Bell, which I'm just now discovering was ranked by *PC World* as the worst manufactured PC of all time. But we still liked it at the time. I think if I had to go back and use it now, I'd be pulling my hair out—because today, it would be like entering a horse-drawn carriage in a stock-car race.

And that's pretty much our world in a nutshell—outdated in months, obsolete in a few years. The concept of a decade becomes roughly equivalent to ancient history.

So when someone points out that parts of the Bible are almost 3½ millennia old, it's no surprise that my head has a slight bit of difficulty grappling with those numbers.

The word *millennium* is Latin in origin and refers (I am convinced) to the length of time that passes during one of those family road trips that involve you being stuck between your brother and sister in the back seat with your feet on that stupid little hump when your sister won't stop poking you and "Mom, she's not staying on her side, and I have to go to the bathroom, and are we there yet, are we there yet, are we there yet?" or, in simpler terms, "a thousand years."

Almost 3,500 years old. That's insane. How can

anything that ancient possibly have any relevance today?

It can't, a lot of people will tell you. They'll say that the Bible is just like my old Packard Bell—useful once upon a time, but now nothing more than an outmoded relic of a bygone era. Society has changed since then, and so has what defines right and wrong.

They'll tell you this as their loveless marriages collapse into petty disputes, as their circle of friends dwindles because of their tendency to bend the truth and stab backs, as their bodies are wracked with the effects of sexually transmitted diseases or substance abuse, as their credit card bills swallow their bank accounts whole—as their lives self-destruct.

If the physical laws of this existence are unchanging, why would the spiritual laws be any different?

Unchanging constants

The argument almost makes sense on the surface. After all, everything changes, doesn't it? Societal values shift across distance and time. What was acceptable dress in 14th-century Japan would likely be frowned upon in a 21st-century American business meeting. So it only makes sense that right and wrong, like all things societal, would change as a culture does.

But truth is not a suit. It is not an outfit to be mixed and matched, discarded and replaced to keep in step with the latest trends. It's an unchanging constant unaltered by time or culture.

Imagine a man about to walk off a cliff. A panicked crowd of friends behind him screams warnings,



The Bible is almost 3,500 years old. How can anything so ancient possibly have any relevance today?

begging him not to do it. The man pauses in mid stride and turns around. “Don’t worry!” he tells them. “I don’t believe in gravity. It’s an archaic idea that just doesn’t fit into my personal worldview.” With that, he takes his final step over the edge.

Do you think gravity will be paying particular attention to the man’s worldview?

Your thoughts and feelings on the physical forces in nature are pretty irrelevant. Gravity will continue to hold the matter of the universe together, regardless of your opinion on its necessity. You might disagree with the laws of inertia, but a falling object can still give you a nasty bruise if it hits you. You can’t systematically wish away aspects of the universe just because you don’t agree with them. They’re still there, and, whether or not you believe in them, they’re still going to interact with you—like gravity pulling a man down a cliff.

If the physical laws of this existence are unchanging, why would the *spiritual* laws be any different?

Essential guidelines of eternal value

What the Bible offers is a guidebook to interactions—with people, with things, with life in general. Rather than leave you to figure out the spiritual equivalent of walking off a cliff on your own, the Word of God lays out all the principles you’ll ever need to make the important decisions in your life. In its pages, you’ll find a thorough examination of what makes for a good idea and what makes for a terrible one.

The Bible deals with questions like:

- What do you do when you’re faced with an interpersonal conflict? (See Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-17.)

- How should you treat the most important relationships in your life? (See Ephesians 5:22-33; 6:1-4.)

- How can you put your foot down on an issue and still show compassion? (See Luke 17:3; Proverbs 10:12.)

It also deals with character traits worth developing (1 Corinthians 13:4-8; 2 Peter 1:5-8), habits worth avoiding (Proverbs 6:9-19), friends worth having (Proverbs 27:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9-10) and maybe a thousand other things essential to getting the most out of this life—and the next. Study its words for a lifetime, and you won’t stop uncovering wisdom until your final breath.

Sure, it’s old. But old doesn’t automatically mean obsolete, contrary to everything our culture would have us believe. Friction is old, too, but you don’t see it being replaced by anything. (Which is great, because I’m not big on perpetual motion as a way of life.)

So, is the Bible still relevant after all these years? Well, here’s the thing: It is, and we could tell you all about why until the cows come home. But you’re not going to really believe us until you prove it to yourself, which you can do one of two ways. You can follow the Bible’s words and reap the benefits, or you can ignore them and let the things you refuse to see break you to pieces.

Either way, you’ll find the answer.

(For a quick guide to some of the most relevant relationship tips, read or request *Making Life Work* at www.ucg.org/booklets.)

Jeremy Lallier attends university in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he also works part-time at the home office of the United Church of God.

Keys to Understanding the Bible

How can one make sense of the Word of God? Here are a few basics.

by Ken Treybig

The Bible may be the most controversial all-time best-selling book. Millions consider it to be the written Word of the true God, and even those who don't accept it as divinely inspired often still regard it as a collection of some of the greatest literature in the world.

It is often used as a source of encouragement in times of difficulty and stress. Yet others reject it, saying it is confusing and hard to understand.

Are you one of those who believe the Bible is inspired by God but have trouble understanding it? Would you like to get more benefit from the Bible in our modern world? These tips can help you gain a better understanding of the most powerful and relevant book you will ever study.

God's Word

It's been said that no one is totally unbiased. We all read, hear and see things from our own personal perspective, which is often shaped by our background and life experiences. That means we tend to interpret what we see, hear and read based on what we already know or have experienced. If we approach the Bible from this common human perspective, we will miss much of what God wants us to gain from it.

In Isaiah 55:8-9 God says His ways and thoughts are vastly superior to our human ways and thoughts. We are extremely limited compared to God. We know that we require oxygen to survive, will only live for a limited number of decades and must eat, drink and sleep to maintain our lives. God requires none of this because He lives forever as spirit. He created everything that exists—both visible and invisible—through the One who became Jesus Christ, as explained in Colossians 1:15-17. The One who created us is (and always will be) superior to us.

That being the case, we must approach God's Word ready to be inspired, ready to listen and with an attitude of being willing to change our views. That is the core of the message Jesus brought when He lived as God in the flesh. Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15 both say that when Jesus began to preach,

His core message was to command all people to repent—which means to change.

So to get the most out of the Bible, we must be willing to accept it as God's instruction book for His creation—human life—and be willing to change our perspective to match His, no matter what changes in our thinking that requires of us.

Think addition

Many who try to discredit the Bible do it on the basis of passages they see as contradictory. For example, if one Gospel writer records an event and refers to some aspect that the other Gospel writers don't mention, a skeptic might pounce on that and say the Bible is unreliable. But it is important to think "addition" when reading the Bible. In other words, look to assemble all the pieces of information given by the Bible writers to get the complete picture. God inspired writers from many different backgrounds, personality types and cultures to record His Word over a period of about 1,500 years.

Most of the Bible is written with some information in one place and more in another, so that it takes effort to get the full picture.

Wise King Solomon expressed it this way in Proverbs 25:2: "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter."

One example of this is the historical account of Satan's tempting of Christ. Matthew 4 records that Satan took Jesus up to the top of a pinnacle on the temple in Jerusalem and challenged Him to throw Himself off. Satan quoted Psalm 91:11-12, which says God will protect us with His angels, even to the point of holding us up so we don't dash our foot against a stone. Jesus recognized the incomplete perspective and refused to do that, saying it is also written that we should not tempt (or test) God, quoting a totally different part of Scripture in Deuteronomy 6:16.

It will take work to do a thorough search to find all the relevant passages in the Bible about a particular topic. But remember, Jesus said the path to eternal



Thinking “addition” will help you realize the value in studying the complete Bible.

life is not the broad and easy path. It is the narrow and difficult one (Matthew 7:13-14). Thinking “addition” will help you realize the value in studying the complete Bible—not just part of it.

Various types of material

When studying the Bible, it is also important to realize there is a lot of variety in the material God has recorded for us. You will find there are narrative passages that simply tell what happened, such as in the creation account in Genesis. There are passages that record historical information, such as events in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (in Genesis 12-50), or ancient Israel (much of the Old Testament), or the early New Testament Church (especially the book of Acts).

Other passages focus on instruction in right living (Proverbs, most of Paul’s epistles and other books). And there is a lot of prophecy in both the Old and New Testaments. Narrative has a very different feel and purpose than passages that instruct us in right living (the process of learning to think and act more like God). And both of those are very different from reading prophecy, which tells in advance about events that will come to pass. Knowing how to recognize each type and where you are most likely to find it will be a big key to increasing your understanding.

Basic time line

In addition, having a basic time line of the Bible will help you better recognize what type of passage you are likely to read in any book or section of the Bible.

Genesis is a book about the start of many things—from creation to the extended family of Abraham, which became both the nation of Israel and several other nations. Exodus through 2 Chronicles covers the history of Israel being freed from bondage in Egypt, inheriting the Promised Land, repeated oppression during the time of the judges, the united monarchy and then splitting into the two nations of Israel and Judah, and eventually going into captivity for repeatedly breaking their covenant with God.

Ezra and Nehemiah tell of the return of the Jews to Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity. The prophetic books were written during the time of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The rest of the books in the Old Testament are mostly poetry and wisdom literature collected and written during the same time period—around 1,400 B.C. to 400 B.C.

The New Testament covers the life and teachings of Christ in the early first century (the four Gospel accounts), the history of the early Church (Acts), and the epistles (letters) from various apostles to churches or individuals during the first century. It ends with the prophetic book of Revelation—a capstone on the whole Bible—in which the apostle John was shown specific details of what would lead up to the return of Jesus Christ to earth.

Plan of salvation

Finally, it is also good to have a basic understanding of God’s plan of salvation, which can be simplified as the process of a new creation. God created people with the potential to be changed into spirit beings who will live forever with Him. That process requires human beings to repent, accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and be changed (converted) to think and act more like God. The whole process is outlined in the festivals God established for mankind. For more details on that topic, please refer to our two-part series “God’s Feasts Answer the Big Questions” in the April-June and July-September 2010 issues of *Vertical Thought* (and our free booklet *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* at www.ucg.org/booklets).

These tips won’t answer all the questions you will have about the Bible, but they can get you on the road to a better understanding and will help you live in a way that pleases God. As the apostle Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Ken Treybig is the national coordinator of United Youth Camps. He is also the pastor of the United Church of God congregation in East Texas.

WIIFM

What's In It For Me?

It sounds like it could be a local radio station, but WIIFM is actually the acronym for a question many people are asking today.

by Doug Horchak

WIIFM (“What’s In It For Me?”), whether texted, tweeted or verbalized in person, is an expression that’s become increasingly popular.

Some say the question is only talking about discovering the real value in experiences for a person. Yet those who ask this question are often seen as selfish. They are viewed as self-centered and less likely to donate their time or resources to anything (including altruistic causes) unless they receive something tangible in return.

The narcissism epidemic

Being wrapped up in oneself is not new. The attitude’s been around for 6,000 years, and we human beings have made a habit of it. It seems that being overly preoccupied with self (also known as *narcissism*) is a growing part of post modern culture.

Psychology professors Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell state: “With the collapse of the credit bubble and the deep recession, Americans now clearly see the downsides of overconfidence ... A national poll in June 2009 found that 2 out of 3 college students agreed their generation was more narcissistic than their predecessors—a remarkably honest admission of an unflattering portrait” (*The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*, 2009, p. ix).

We find that God foretold this “love of self” as one of the outcomes of a world gone wild—a world of peril and conflict where man’s selfishness will lead to his global demise.

God inspired the apostle Paul to write to the young evangelist Timothy: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud ... unloving ... haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4). Our Creator knew, in advance, that narcissism and self-absorption would thrive in epidemic proportions at the time of the end.

Give versus get

As we see our culture virtually sprinting down the path of self-adoration, we can see that many in our world today have a problem! What about you? Fundamentally, people are either “givers” or “getters.”

As research shows, most of us fall on the side of actually being a “getter”! We human beings are pretty good at self-preservation and are wired to think of ourselves first

before sacrificing or saving the lives of others. In fact, when an exception happens to this rule, when people do set an example of service and personal sacrifice for the benefit of others, they are celebrated as heroes and sometimes even given awards and medals of honor for their actions.

Thousands of years of man’s history have proven that this tendency toward self-centered thinking has resulted in the violent, divided and troubled conditions we find on earth



today. Jesus Christ knew this would be the cause of man’s demise, as witnessed in His teaching.

In John 15:13 Jesus explained, “The greatest love you can have for your friends is to give your life for them” (Good News Translation). Put differently, we should consider the needs of others before our own. Coming from the Son of God, this was a summation of His solution for world peace—a change in the way we think.

Paul echoed this same principle when He wrote: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:3-5).

Thinking outside the self-serving box in Zambia

So how are selfishness and narcissism overcome? Most authorities will say that the only *cure* for narcissism is changing the way people think about themselves by having them *build relationships* and *learn empathy* for others (Twenge and Campbell, p. 281). Christ explained that having this

approach to life and to others will help a person to ultimately be a part of the solution to man's ills (Matthew 25:31-40).

Realizing this, United Youth Corps projects focus on serving the needs of members of the United Church of God in developing countries around the world. Rather than learning the value of giving and serving others through academic lectures, these projects provide *experiential learning* so that this valuable character trait of serving can be internalized. This can truly change the way a person thinks!

In August 2010 our latest United Youth Corps project took place outside of Lusaka, Zambia. Three volunteers traveled to this part of Africa to teach remedial English classes and basic computer skills to adults. These classes were all conducted in a rural setting where attendees and instructors were camping in tents, cooking from scratch over live coals and sharing meals and time together between classes. It truly was as *experiential* as one could hope for!

Church members from the towns of Mumbwa, Nalubanda and Kitwe gathered together to learn from these young adults from America. Here are some comments from these latest volunteers after spending two weeks serving, teaching and building friendships with those in Zambia:



"During camp, I never really considered the poverty of the people who I shared laughs with, who took notes from my English lesson or whose hands I helped wash. Status was thrown out the window starting from day one, and we were able to relate to one another on a personal level. I was surprised that I didn't feel pity for them; rather, I felt like I had as much or more to learn from them as they hoped to learn from me. It was a sense of equality I'd never felt before, a give and take from one another's wealth of experience and understanding."

—Liz Cannon, who taught remedial English

"This experience has helped me to appreciate not just the physical blessings that I have enjoyed living in the United States, but also the blessing of having been raised in the Church and having a strong network of brethren to rely on and relate to around the world and especially in my home congregation. And what a blessing it is to have my husband and family believe as I do."

—Lena VanAusdle, who taught remedial English

"From the traveling I'd done before now, I was already aware that we enjoy great physical blessings in America. However, I've never been to a place with as many problems as Africa—poverty, corrupt government and disease. I think it would be unbearably sad

to observe the unmet needs people have if I believed this life was all there is. It has also made me realize that in America we have so much more than we really need to be happy. So many of the things that we consider 'necessities' are really luxuries, which in some cases may ironically detract from our happiness."

—Suzanne Lavaty, who taught basic computer skills

These young women made the conscious choice to sacrifice time and money to help others in need. They all realized the value of getting one's mind off personal interests. They experienced firsthand how serving the needs of others could change the way they thought. They learned that valuing other people leads to greater purpose and vision in their own lives.

WIIFM?

In some ways, it isn't the question of "WIIFM?" that is the real problem. "What's In It For Me?" may have started with a selfish motive, but the real issue is *why* we ask the question and what we mean by it. If we learn to reverse the human tendency to think of the self first and ask instead, "What value is there for you and me in such a new, selfless way of thinking?"—then it becomes a good question.

Our United Youth Corps volunteers say that they benefited greatly from their experience. Over the years through vari-

ous projects, many have said they've learned to appreciate more (both people and blessings) and complain less.

Others have realized that sacrifice and service (a selfless approach) is actually a key component to peace between peoples and nations. Still others have mentioned the personal

fulfillment of knowing that they were able to better the life of another through their acts of help and service.

The best benefit

While getting involved in serving the needs of others is an important part of our lives as Christians today, the bigger and more lasting benefit lies yet ahead. Such service is actually part of the ultimate humanitarian cause, which will eventually serve all humanity.

The Bible teaches that God is working with and training people now for service to others when Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Through His Church, He is preparing people who will not focus on themselves, but will display the kind of humble, serving leadership that Christ taught and exemplified in His life.

As we learn the spiritual lesson of serving others today, we prepare to help build a new, better world tomorrow.

Doug Horchak, a husband and father and coordinator of the United Youth Corps program, pastors congregations in Dallas and Sherman, Texas.



Money Management 101

In a tough economy, managing your personal finances is more important than ever. Here are some tips for saving and spending your hard-earned cash.

by Becky Sweat

It's no secret we're living in tough economic times. No matter what country you're living in, it's likely you and your parents are feeling the impact of financial pressures. In the United States, for example, businesses are failing, and new layoff announcements are coming practically every day. Parents are concerned about losing their jobs or whether they're going to be able to pay their bills. At the very least, they're probably tightening their belts and postponing major purchases.

You, too, may be feeling the pinch of our faltering economy. Perhaps there are items your parents would have bought for you in the past, like designer sneakers and video games, to which they're now saying "No." Maybe you've noticed that clothing, electronics and entertainment costs have all gone up. If you're planning on going to college or moving to your own apartment in the next couple of years, you may be wondering how you're going to make it.

These are all reasons good money management is important. Your money only goes so far, so you need to use it wisely.

Remember, as a young adult, you're not just managing your money; you're developing financial skills you will use the rest of your life."

Of course, if you're still a teen and living with your parents, they're probably paying for your "essential" living expenses—a basic wardrobe, food, shelter, school supplies, etc. However, they may expect you to pay for the "non-essential" items with your own money—MP3 players, text messaging fees, jewelry, sporting equipment, entertain-

ment, etc. They may also expect you to save for future "big ticket" expenses, like a car or college tuition. This is going to require you to carefully manage your money now.

In a down economy like we're facing today, sound financial practices are even more essential. Money is tight and getting tighter. You're going to have to work extra hard to keep your finances in order. The following steps will help.

Prepare a budget

The number one step you can take is to create a budget for yourself. Simply put, "a budget is a plan for how you are going to spend your money," says Karen Varcoe, Ph.D., a financial adviser and consumer economics specialist with the University of California Cooperative Extension. Budgeting helps you see how you are using your money and where you need to make adjustments.

The first thing you need to do is estimate your total monthly income. Include your allowance, money earned from a part-time or summer job, and even occasional income you get from things like babysitting, yard work or shoveling snow.

Next, make a list of all your monthly expenses. Put down everything you have to pay for with your own money, such as clothes, makeup, eating out, movies, music downloads, texting fees, CDs, video and computer games, and gifts.

Add up your income and then your expenses and compare the two. If you have more income than expenses, you're off to a great start. You can use this excess to put into savings. If your expenses are more than your income, you will have to reduce some of your spending. Decide what expenditures are most important to you or necessary, and which are not so necessary.

After you have a good idea of where your money is going

each month, you can figure out where your money *should* be going. This will be your actual budget. Come up with a dollar figure for how much of your income should go to various spending categories each month—tithes, clothing, entertainment, spending money, short-term savings, long-term or college savings, etc. Other than tithes, the percentages for the other budgetary categories are variable. You will need to decide exactly what you want to use your money on each month, based on your priorities.

You can set up your budget on the computer or get a ledger book. Record your expenditures each month, and keep a running total of how much you've spent in each budgetary category. This will help you see on an ongoing basis if you're spending too much.

"If you get to the point where there's no more money left for the month in a particular category, stop spending," says Dr. Varcoe. "Don't let yourself spend what's not in the budget."



Cut back, not out

When spending reductions are necessary, think in terms of "cutting back" rather than "cutting out," says Shirley Anderson-Porisch, a financial adviser with the University of Minnesota Extension. "Cut outs are a form of deprivation, which usually sets people up for failure. Cut backs get people moving in a positive direction, and sets them up for success."

Simply put, this means if you are spending \$5 a week on snacks, rather than cut out these snacks altogether, you might just need to reduce the spending to \$3 a week. After a year you will have saved \$104.

Know the difference between *needs* and *wants*

Another aspect of budgeting is differentiating between *needs* and *wants*. "Needs sustain our lives; wants make

life more comfortable, but aren't necessary," explains Ms. Anderson-Porisch. For instance, a pair of jeans may be a need, but the \$200 pair of designer jeans advertised by your favorite celebrity is a want.

Chances are, you probably won't be able to fulfill all your wants as you go through life, especially in a down economy. If budget cutbacks need to be made, knowing what's a need rather than just a want will help you make the right decisions.

Save at least half your income

Ms. Anderson-Porisch also encourages teens to save at least 50 percent of their income. That could be divvied up between long- and short-term savings. Long-term savings would be money you would let build for several years or more, perhaps for college tuition or to use for a car down payment. Short-term savings would be for items you want to buy within the next few months, such as a high school

ring, iPad or prom dress. These are items that cost more than what you receive in a single paycheck or allowance.

She advises you put your long-term savings in a certificate of deposit (CD) or money market account. These generally pay a higher interest rate than standard savings accounts.

With CDs, you do have to leave the money in the bank for a certain period of time, generally at least a year. Money market accounts typically have restrictions on the number of withdrawals you can make. But if this is for your long-term savings, these restrictions shouldn't be a problem.

Shop wisely

Shop around for expensive items like MP3 players, smart phones and watches to make sure you are getting a quality product at a good price. Don't buy the first

one you see. Check out as many stores as you can, including online retailers, and compare prices. It's not uncommon for the same item to be much cheaper in one store than in another.

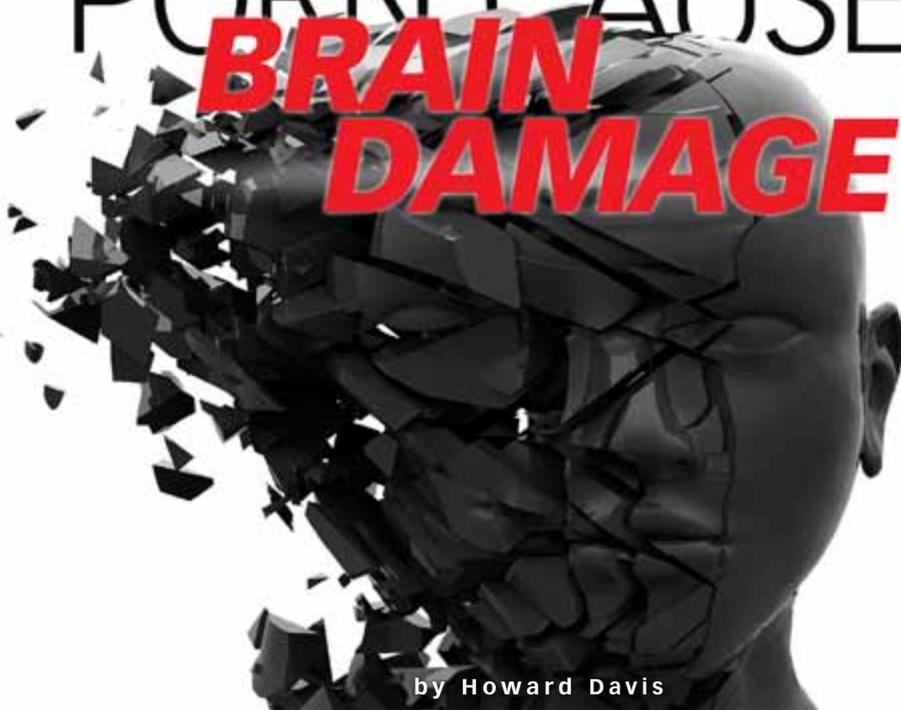
Before you go shopping, make a list of items you need or have budgeted for, and don't purchase anything that's not on your list. This means if you're going to the mall to shop for a prom dress, don't also buy a new pair of boots when you see them on display. If you see other items for sale that you might want, wait a few days before you buy them



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PORN CAUSES

BRAIN DAMAGE



by Howard Davis

Let's face it. After 20 years of exposure to thousands of hours of pornography, Jack's brain didn't work the way it did when he started secretly viewing it as a young adult. In fact, it hardly worked at all.

Eventually Jack's wife, Laurie Hall, left him and wrote her true-life experience in the book *An Affair of the Mind*. Mark Kastleman quotes from her book at NetNanny.com, including a quote from Dr. Ron Miller after he examined Jack. Dr. Miller told Jack: "You've destroyed your mind by fantasizing. You've dug a deep channel going in one direction. The rest of your mind is atrophied!"

The occasional use of porn for a few minutes of secret pleasure as a young adult planted the seeds of his neurological destruction. It reduced Jack's high-level engineering brain, trained through a college degree and years in a professional management position, into a bumbling nightmare of blank staring and the inability to remember even the simplest activities of daily living (such as boiling tea in the kitchen) or to hold a meaningful conversation.

Jack's good income as a regional manager had been reduced to a menial laborer's wage of packing bags of chocolates for \$7.25 per hour.

Sadly, Jack's is not an isolated story. Vast numbers of people view pornography and suffer the consequences. But how does porn damage brain structure and function? And what can be done about this problem?

A rampant evil

A curse of modern society is that all people, including *Vertical Thought* readers, have to fight exposure to pornography in its astonishing array of forms. In our debased global culture, porn is not going away.

Research shows that seeing is actually doing when it comes to how our brains work.

Consider these facts about porn from various news sources:

- 25 percent of search engine requests are pornographic (68 million per day).
- 70 percent of 18- to 24-year-old males visit porn sites in a typical month.
- 20 percent of men admit to watching porn on computers at work.
- 2.5 billion pornographic e-mails are sent daily.

In this porn-laced world, hundreds of millions of people are vulnerable to developing the psychological disorder of sex addiction. The porn industry's targeted destination is your brain. It bulldozes over the higher-thinking functions of the frontal lobes and cortex where logic and values and relationships are processed. Put another way, porn is designed to condition the human heart to be evil in its intents.

Porn changes brain circuitry

Mark Kastleman also quotes Dr. Gary Lynch, a neuroscientist at the University of California at Irvine, who explains what happens when the powerful imagery in pictures and action-packed pornographic scenes hit the

human eye and when they are processed deep down in the many layers of brain structure.

“What we are saying here is that an event which lasts half a second, within five to ten minutes has produced a structural change that is in some ways as profound as the structural changes one sees in [brain] damage.”

Mark Kastleman concludes: “Stored away in the cells of your brain and body are all the things you have ever seen, heard, felt, tasted or smelled. That’s why Dr. Miller was able to tell Jack after 20 years of porn, ‘You’ve destroyed your mind by fantasizing. You’ve dug a deep channel going in one direction.’ Jack had literally developed a one-track mind.”

Overcoming this sin

God condemns pornography because it is horribly destructive of the spectacular and wonderful human potential. The human brain needs to be preserved and helped to develop the full capacities for vertical thinking for which this magazine is designed. So here is what we need to do to overcome this ever-present influence in today’s media.

1. Immunize yourself from our world’s porn-saturated media and culture by having a totally focused spiritual connection with God through regular prayer and Bible study.
2. Stay away from pornography in all forms. Understand that curiosity killed the cat. And it can kill you, too (spiritually speaking)!

The research shows that *seeing* is actually *doing* when it comes to how our brains work. Jesus Christ said that looking at a woman with lustful intent—and not just the physical act—is adultery (Matthew 5:28). He was 2,000 years ahead of the detailed findings of our neurosciences today. That’s because He created the human mind.

3. Develop a “noble and good heart” (Luke 8:15). Be totally dedicated in upholding God’s standards, words and character as the basis for your own thinking. You need a very strong conviction against pornography, to the point where you find it disgusting and repulsive. We must look at it as a form of mental illness and a destructive evil instead of pleasurable entertainment.

4. When you use the Internet, be very clear about what you plan to look up. Don’t allow the natural boredom of life to lead you to explore things that will damage your mind.

5. If you have exposed yourself to pornography, realize that we have a Savior who will both forgive and will provide the spiritual help to overcome all our character flaws. Jesus wants us to repent and “sin no more” (John 8:11).

God designed the human brain as the physical mechanism for the development of the human mind, which He wants to transform within us to be like His (Romans 12:2). Our ultimate destiny is to be His children in His family forever! Don’t let anything damage your mind and stop you from reaching that destiny!

Howard Davis is a minister who works in the media department of the United Church of God.

Money Management

From page 15



so you can think it over. Avoid impulse purchases, especially if buying these items would make you go over your budget.

Limit the amount of cash you carry

When you go shopping or out to eat with friends, take only a small amount of cash with you. “The less cash you carry, the less you can spend on impulse or frivolous purchases,” says Varcoe. For instance, if you are going out for ice cream, you are consciously limiting how much you’re going to spend if you only bring a \$5 bill. You would probably spend more if you had a \$10 bill with you. A few dollars saved here and there can really make a difference.

Don’t buy on credit

If you receive a credit card offer in the mail, “throw it away,” Dr. Varcoe urges. “When you have a credit card, it’s way too easy to spend money you shouldn’t or don’t have.”

For high school and college students, buying on credit is especially problematic, Varcoe says, because they don’t have full-time jobs and cannot pay off the credit card balances they accrue. Not only that, but credit cards have higher interest rates than almost any other type of borrowing—sometimes 20 percent or more.

Yet high school students are increasingly being targeted by credit card companies. According to the Jump\$tart Coalition for Financial Literacy, 34.7 percent of high school seniors use credit cards. Half of them use cards issued in their parents’ names, and half use cards issued in their own names.

But it’s not just high school seniors who are buying on credit. Nowadays, teens as young as 14 or 15 are receiving credit card solicitations. If teens don’t obtain a credit card in high school, they are almost certain to get one during their freshman year in college.

“You may tell yourself you want a credit card only for an ‘emergency,’ but as soon as you start using it, things can quickly spiral out of control,” Varcoe says. She says many college students are “over their heads in credit card debt” even before they graduate—definitely not the way to start adulthood.

These are all important steps to consider while you are still a teen or when you become an adult, whether the economy is robust or recessionary.

Remember, “You’re not just managing your money; you’re developing financial skills you will use the rest of your life,” says Ms. Anderson-Porisch. If you’re money savvy, you will be much more ready to tackle whatever financial challenges come your way in the future.

For further study, request our free booklet *Managing Your Finances*.

Becky Sweat is a freelance writer specializing in health and family topics. She lives in the Dallas, Texas, area with her husband and two sons.



A Life Without Regrets?

Most of us have some regrets. Some of these affect only us; some affect family, friends and others. Here is how you can minimize them in your own life.

by Milan Janicich

Today it's quite common to see a sports figure, a screen star or a politician who ruined a marriage because of an affair. It's also quite routine to see people abuse alcohol or drugs and subsequently behave improperly or say things they shouldn't.

Sometimes a person's choice takes him or her to a hospital, and sometimes to jail. In situations such as these we often hear heartfelt expressions of sorrow and regret. In some cases careers are ruined. Tragically, some accidentally or purposely cause their own deaths.

While the lives of media figures are readily available for all of us to see, similar examples occur all around us. Is there any way for each of us to avoid making these same mistakes?

Because we are human, it is inevitable that we will look back and see things that we wish we had done differently. Regret typically comes in two varieties: things we regret we *did* and things we regret we *didn't* do.

As for regretting certain actions, some are immediately obvious. If we lie or cheat or steal, we'll quickly, it is hoped, recognize that these actions are wrong, repent

of them and resolve not to do them again. Sometimes, however, it takes time to recognize our wrongs.

The other type of regret is over not having done something we know we should have or wish we would have. Examples here include not having accepted blame for something we did wrong, allowing someone else to take the rap, and not having stuck up for someone younger or weaker when we were able to do so. Many who never finished college wish they had worked a bit harder to do so.

Perhaps we wish we had been a little bolder and learned to rock climb, water-ski or dance. Maybe we wish we had ridden the zip line or joined the speech club. Sadly, many times there is no way to go back and make a different choice.

So what can we do to have fewer regrets?

Right choices

Regrets generally flow from poor choices, followed by similarly poor actions or lack of action. So how do we avoid wrong choices? The answer is simple: Know and obey the law of God.

God instructs us in the perfect way to live—the way that

will produce happiness and peace of mind. Living as God tells us frees us from many later regrets. God knows there are things that we should and should not do to have a happy life. We find these lessons throughout the Bible. Some sections, such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7, are rich with guidance on how to avoid regret.

Looking back at several of the previously mentioned scenarios, let's note how obeying God's law would have prevented regret.

God does not want anyone to suffer regret from wrong or poor choices. He wants us to live life to the full. That's why He gives us very specific guidelines for a way of life that produces happiness and peace.

- Obeying God's command of "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14) could have spared many marriages and families much suffering and immeasurable regret.
- Obeying God's command to "flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18) eliminates the shame and regret of premarital sex—regret that may last a lifetime and may result in an unplanned pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease.
- The accounts of Noah and Lot (Genesis 9 and 19) show us some of the perils and consequences of drinking to excess. God tells us, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1). Many lives might have been saved from ruin and many problems averted if alcohol had not been abused.
- The Bible repeatedly cautions us to be careful in what we say. James tells us, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). Choosing our words carefully can prevent later regrets.

- Failing to be more diligent at work or school can lead to regrets, as can failing to step out and try something new in our lives. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might," Solomon wrote (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Working diligently produces results. Working hard at school for a better grade can lead to a scholarship. And trying something new can open up new opportunities. Joining the robotics club, for example, may eventually lead to an interesting career.

God's encouragement

When we seek to live according to God's laws and His way of life, He promises to help us. Under these circumstances, He has a message for us just as He did for Joshua: "Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

It is an interesting study of the Bible to search out where God specifically says, "Do not be afraid." We see that He said this directly to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Peter, Paul, John and others. God desires that we experience the good things in life and trust Him to help us in whatever circumstances we face. When we strive to please God and trust in Him, we can also be bold in our actions.

All of God's laws and instructions teach us how to live happily and avoid regrets. The laws of God are not given to prevent us from having a good time. The exact opposite is true. God does not want anyone to suffer regret from wrong or poor choices. He wants us to live life to the full. That's why He gives us very specific guidelines for a way of life that produces happiness and peace.

Similar to Deuteronomy 30:19, where God says that He has set before us "life and death, blessing and cursing," and that He wants us to "choose life," we also have the choice between a life with fewer regrets and one that is certain to cause them. Let's choose the one with fewer regrets. It's the better life!

Milan Janicich attends the Salem, Oregon, congregation of the United Church of God with his wife Elizabeth. He is the father of two grown children and one grandson that he adores.



VT Commentaries: *Serving up our approach to:*

World conditions, fashion trends, international crises, economic hardship, sports and media, moral values and personal experience.

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Creating Spiritual Routines

With all the demands and expectations placed on a college student today, how is it possible to fit in time for God?

The professor stood at the front of the classroom holding a large glass jar. Next to her lay a pile of big river rocks, a heap of smaller pebbles and a bucket full of beach sand. Setting down her coffee cup, she asked the class, “If you were given the task of successfully filling this jar with all of these materials, how would you go about it to maximize what fits inside?”

A low murmur filled the large lecture hall as students turned to their neighbors and began sharing their ideas. Finally, one brave student raised his hand and suggested that you have to put the biggest objects in first so the smaller ones can fit around them.

“Very good idea,” the professor responded as she gestured for him to come down to the front of the class and test out his theory. The student carefully put the big rocks in the bottom of the jar, then dropped in the pebbles, and lastly poured in the sand. The rest of the class watched as the sand filled the tiny spaces that weren’t even visible before, until the jar was completely full.

“Now consider what would have happened if he had filled the jar in the opposite way. Some of the largest objects would not have fit into the jar because the sand would have taken up most of the room, right?”

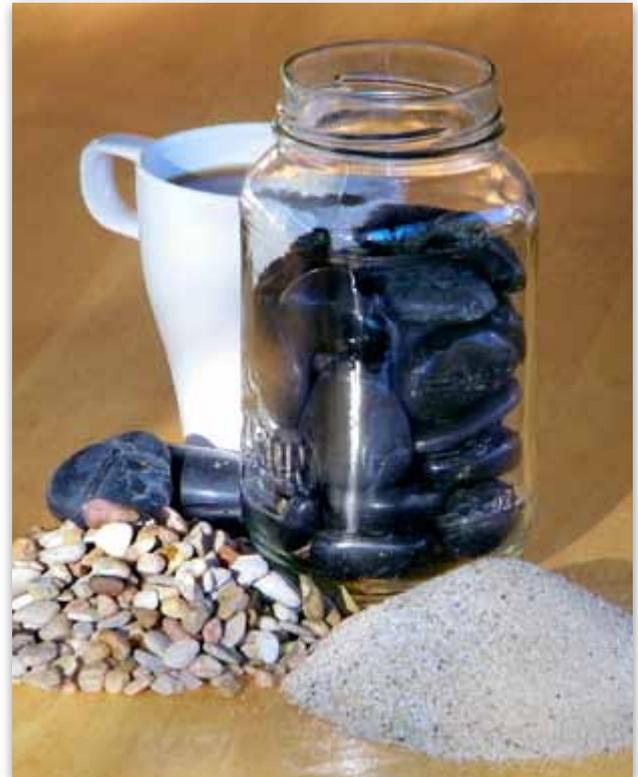
The class nodded in agreement.

“So if this jar is your life, then what are your ‘big rocks’?” the professor asked. “These are the biggest priorities that you need to make time for in your life and should focus on first. Yet what often happens is that we fill our lives with the least important things—the sand—that take our time and energy away from focusing on what really matters most in our lives.”

Picking up her coffee cup again, she now asked the class, “Can anything else fit into this jar?” A few students shook their heads, while others looked back quizzically. The professor proceeded to slowly pour the remainder of her coffee into the jar, and the brown liquid quickly percolated into the sand.

“What does this show?” she asked. A student in the front row fired back quickly, “You can ALWAYS find space to fit something else in!” The class broke into laughter, knowing from their own busy college lives that this was all too true.

“Not exactly,” the professor responded. “While you can always *try* to cram more in, this coffee symbolizes the relationships that you need to maintain, even when your ‘life jar’ looks and feels completely full. *When your jar is full, you need to take a coffee break.*”



With the many activities and demands placed on a student’s life, making time for a deep relationship with God can get pushed aside.

While this classic story has several variations, the moral is consistent: Knowing what the big rocks should be in our lives is crucial before we start filling up our own “life jars.” However, most students don’t realize that they haven’t made enough time for their most important priorities—creating a healthy lifestyle, maintaining relationships with close friends and family, focusing on their spiritual lives—until all of their time is already invested in other activities.

With all the various classes, activities and demands placed on a college student’s life these days, making time for *developing and maintaining a deep and lasting relationship with God* often gets pushed to the side because of an already overly full life. Even though our relationship with God should be the largest rock in our lives, it often doesn’t fit into our

Student Voices

Spiritual Routines in College

Here's what other students and recent college graduates had to say when asked, "What is your spiritual routine in college?"

"One thing I realized toward the end of my undergraduate degree was that I was spending almost all of my time studying and not enough time on my relationship with God, after which I made an effort to not discuss college, classes and the inevitable sleep deprivation on the Sabbath. I would look forward to weekly Friday night chats with Church friends where we'd discuss either a Bible study from the Church's Web site or other Bible topics we were studying. This along with the other strategies helped me a lot."

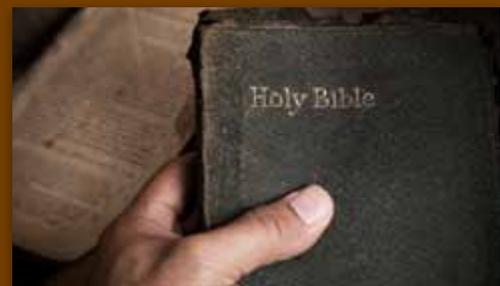
Male master's student, Ohio

"While I was in college, I knew that if I did not take the time to pray in the morning, when my mind was fresh, I would never get the chance to, and my entire day would be off. I found that kneeling in prayer with a fresh cup of coffee in hand helped me to slow down while talking to God, giving Him and the time I was spending with Him my full attention."

Female college graduate, Wisconsin

"While at university I would set aside a specific amount of time for prayer and study every Friday night. I would put it in my calendar and keep to it. As with anything, if you don't plan to keep an appointment, you'll always find something else that is perhaps also important to fill the time. I found it helpful to think of it as an appointment that I had to keep."

Male college graduate, Washington, D.C.



jar of life. Sometimes we don't even make time for a quick "coffee break" with God. We claim our lives are simply too full.

While it's easy to make excuses as to why these spiritual routines get neglected, given all the other demands on our time and energy, imagine what your life would be like if you felt more spiritually connected, engaged and supported.

King David is a great example of a young man who earnestly and continually sought after God (Psalm 63:1). And because of the relationship David actively developed with God, He appointed David to be a great leader and called him "a man after His own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). What do you want God to call you?

Seeking God daily and calling on Him is crucial to maintaining a strong relationship with Him, both in college and throughout life (Isaiah 55:6). Yet intentionally and proactively setting aside an appropriate amount of time in a busy college student schedule for regular prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting often seems daunting. Use the action steps below as a starting point to create and sustain healthy spiritual routines in college.

What's in your jar?

Take a moment to consider what you've filled your life with now—classes, student organizations, service projects, time with friends, among other activities and commitments. What is taking up the most space? What is left out of your jar because it doesn't fit?

Identify your big rocks

Now determine what your biggest priorities are and see if you have created enough space for them in your life. What do you need to change or even eliminate to make more time for seeking a deeper relationship with God and spiritual fellowship with like-minded friends?

Strategically fill your jar

After you know what needs to go into your jar first, it's time to establish *how* these big rocks will fit in your jar on a regular basis. Decide what spiritual routines you want to develop in your life—morning Bible study, personal prayer with God, Sabbath fellowship and more. Then build your other activities around these routines instead of trying to find time for them after you schedule everything else.

Remember to take coffee breaks

Life is busy, and sometimes even the most well-intentioned routines don't happen in the way or at the time we desire. Remember: When you feel overwhelmed and think that you don't have time for one more thing, this is the *most* important time to take a short "coffee break" and reestablish your connection with our Holy Creator. Spend some time in prayer or meditation on His Word, take a deep breath and then jump back into the busyness of life.

By intentionally examining your own life and creating some personal spiritual routines, you can begin to develop and deepen your relationship with God while in college.

Leslie Schwartz, M.Ed., loves working with college students to foster their leadership development at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She attends the Bloomington/Normal United Church of God congregation. Have a question, comment or idea for a future topic for this column? Contact Leslie at VTLifeOnCampus@gmail.com.



Happy People See Happy People

Those who are happy, emotionally stable and well-adjusted see others as happy and well-adjusted. A study at Wake Forest University in North Carolina found that how we perceive other people mirrors our own state of well-being.

Participants who tended to judge others positively were found to be more happy, kind-hearted and courteous themselves. Viewing others negatively reflects self-centered and antisocial tendencies in ourselves (Richard Alleyne, "Happy People More Likely to See Others as Happy," *Telegraph.co.uk*, Aug. 3, 2010).

Developing friendships requires a positive outlook and an eye for the good in others, which, in turn, makes us friendlier.

Laptop Danger: **Toasted Skin Syndrome**

Have you ever noticed how uncomfortable it is to have a laptop resting on your legs for a long period of time? Well, it turns out that long-term exposure to the heat produced by the computers can cause something called "toasted skin syndrome."

Long-term, low-grade heat, like that from a laptop, can cause a mottled appearance and sometimes permanent darkening of the skin. Also, it can, in very rare cases, lead to skin cancer according to Swiss researchers from University Hospital Basel ("Toasted Skin

Syndrome' Warning for Laptop Users," *NewYork.CBSlocal.com*, Oct. 4, 2010).

For a commonsense solution, experts recommend limiting direct contact between laptop and skin by using a heat shield. Best of all, place the laptop on a desk or stand.



You're Grounded ... Digitally Speaking

Many parents are using digital grounding as a tool of discipline. Parents are removing privileges to use Facebook, cell phones, iPods and other digital devices following an indiscretion. For a trend of low grades on report cards, a parent might revoke Facebook and cell phone privileges for a specific period of time or until grades improve.

A Pew Internet and American Life Project study has found that 62 percent of parents have taken away a cell phone as punishment. Whereas grounding used to mean not going out, driving the car or using the standard phone, it has



now extended to the area of life where social activities have migrated for most teens—the digital world (Donna St. George, "Parents Use 'Digital' Grounding as a 21st-Century Disciplinary Tool," *WashingtonPost.com*, Sept. 5, 2010).

52%

of American adults (18+) married in 2009, the lowest percentage in more than 100 years.

—Hope Yen, "Census Data: Marriages in 2009 at Record Low Level," *News.Yahoo.com*, Sept. 28, 2010

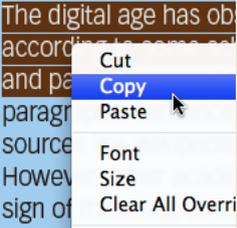
Stormy Space: Northern Lights

Few events capture the beauty of God's magnificent creation better than the northern lights, or aurora borealis. During this current period of increased solar activity, leading to a solar maximum (a period of incredible storm activity and flares from the sun), these atmospheric disturbances are clearly seen.

A recent fantastic display of the auroras was caused, say scientists, by a massive solar storm. An explosive flare from an active sunspot sent a stream of charged particles toward the earth at 250 miles per second, followed by more flares. The beautiful colors and undulations of the auroras were the result of reactions among atoms and molecules in the earth's atmosphere (Andrew Hough and Sarah Kelley, "Spectacular Northern Lights Display Pictured After Violent Space Storm," *Telegraph.co.uk*, Sept. 9, 2010).



The Plagiarism Plague



The digital age has obscured the evils of plagiarism, according to some school administrators. The “cut and paste” function has made it easy to grab a few paragraphs, sentences or phrases here and there from sources like Wikipedia and similar informational Web sites. However, other academics believe that plagiarism is less a sign of the times and more a sign of laziness in students.

Most of the 196 cases of plagiarism at the University of California Davis were not from students ignorant of how to cite sources, but from students who simply didn't care enough to do their own work (Trip Gabriel, “Plagiarism Lines Blur for Students in Digital Age,” NYTimes.com, Aug. 1, 2010).

Plagiarism is a serious offense. As copyright laws begin to tighten, and they have recently, it is more and more important to credit sources when creating a document of any kind. When in doubt, cite; it doesn't take very much extra effort. Even sources like Wikipedia need to be given a brief citation—after all, if the source is wrong, do you really want to take full credit for the mistake?

Taking something from someone without permission is theft, and taking intellectual property (writing, etc.) from someone and pretending it is your own is also theft. God condemns theft in the Ten Commandments. Give others the gift of your original thoughts, and give credit to the originality of others.

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Thieves Use Social Networking to Stalk Their Victims

Fifty former criminals, surveyed by an insurance company, revealed that social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter provide much information about the habits of victims. One former burglar explained that while in the past thieves would pay the postman or milkman for information about the habits of home owners, now that information is freely publicized by people who update their pages with endless details about daily schedules and vacation dates when their houses will be empty (Harry Wallop, “Burglars Using Twitter and Facebook to ‘Case the Joint,’” Telegraph.co.uk, July 20, 2010).

To be on the safe side, don't post excessive details about your vacation plans or daily schedule. Also, make sure that your Twitter and Facebook pages are private to ensure that your information isn't being made accessible to everyone via search engines like Google and Bing.



The Internet Grows Up

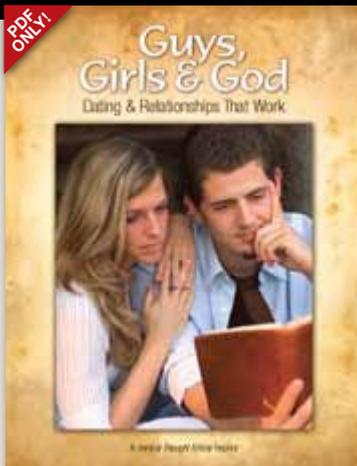
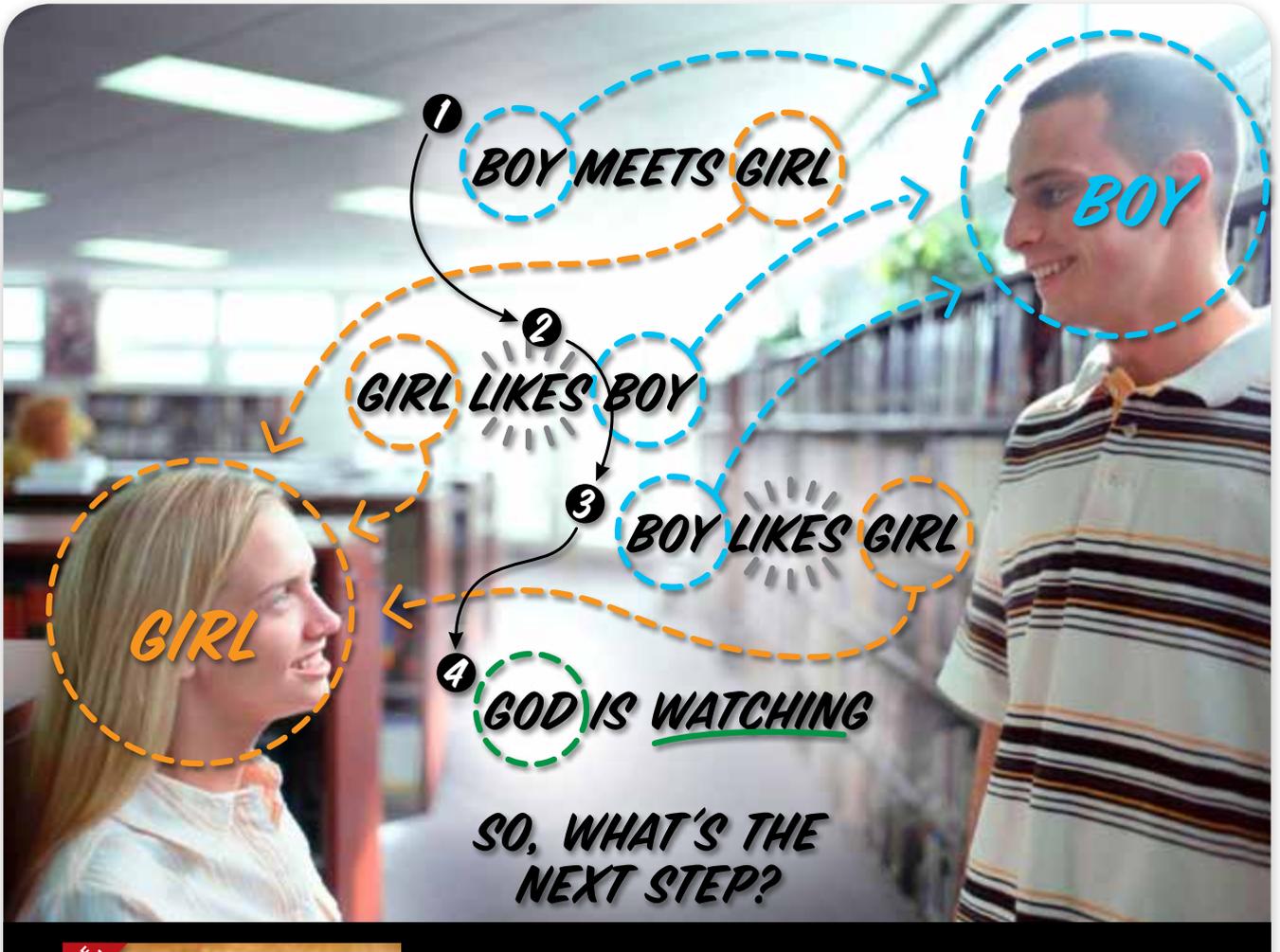
Now, 18 years after the Internet was born for public use, some experts claim that part of it, the World Wide Web, is dying (well, maybe not growing as fast). Many people are using applications rather than Web pages to receive information, especially on their phones. Applications provide information like movies via Netflix, news via RSS feed and music via iTunes. These applications can bring preselected types of information to the user, rather than require the user to employ a search engine to track down the information and then spend time sifting through it. Companies like Apple also use applications to get past the “information wants to be free” aspect of the Web.

The Internet has also begun to lose its egalitarian atmosphere. In the early years it was seen as a platform from which millions of people could see and be seen, where the “little guy” could make it big. Well, the little guys have made it big, and Internet monopolies that will eclipse even Google, such as Facebook, are the wave of the future (Chris Anderson and Michael Wolff, “The Web Is Dead. Long Live the Internet,” Wired.com, Aug. 17, 2010).

King Herod Goes to the Theater

Archaeologist Ehud Netzer of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and his team have found a royal viewing box that was a part of King Herod's private theater at his fortress of Herodium, 7.5 miles south of Jerusalem. The fully excavated seating area exemplifies the luxurious court of Herod in the time leading up to the coming of Christ.

The back and sides of the viewing box, which was used at the pleasure of the king, his family and close friends, were richly painted and decorated with plaster moldings. The style is unlike any previous styles discovered in Israel and is likely Roman in origin, created by artists from Italy. It was dated approximately to the year 15 B.C. (Ronen Shnidman, “King Herod's Royal Theater Box Uncovered at Herodium,” JPost.com, Sept. 15, 2010).



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