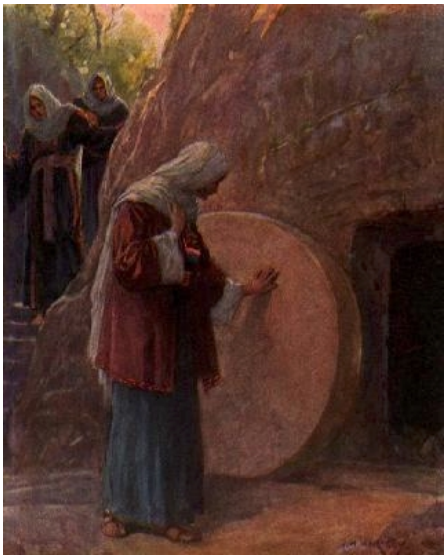
Virtual Christian Magazine
Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."—Matthew 18:3

Volume 6 Number 3 March 2004

Lessons From Two Resurrections

By Bruce Gore *Page 3*



John's Gospel details two quite different resurrections. Both were miracles. But what the disciples saw in the second transformed their lives, giving them power and conviction to face trials, persecution and even martyrdom for an astounding truth.

What's My Purpose Here?

By Gary Petty *Page 9*



There must be some meaning to humanity's mixture of awesome abilities and awful atrocities. What is the ultimate purpose and meaning for your life?

Where Have All the Leaders Gone?

By Howard Davis *Page 15*



As Americans prepare to choose who will occupy the most powerful office on the planet, it's time to ask some crucial questions: What is a leader, and what makes a leader great?

Choosing Movies and Music: What's Going Into Your Mind?

By Larry Greider *Page 19*



Young people just want to have fun. But how should one decide what music to listen to and which movies to see?

Become Like Little Children

By Lisa Damour *Page 23*



Being a preschool teacher is a wonderful opportunity to see God's gentle, loving, childlike nature at work.

Letters to the Editor

Page 25

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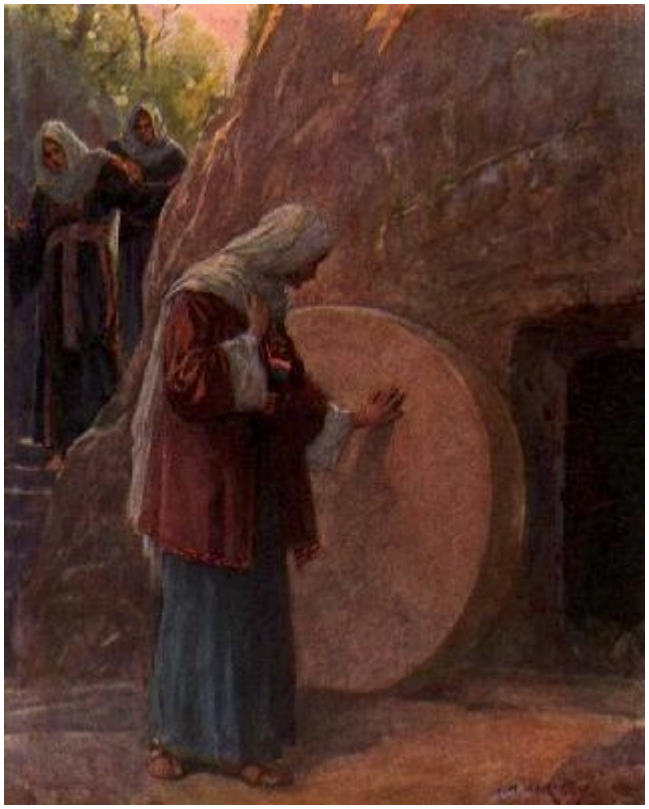
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Lessons From Two Resurrections

By Bruce Gore

John's Gospel details two quite different resurrections. Both were miracles. But what the disciples saw in the second transformed their lives, giving them power and conviction to face trials, persecution and even martyrdom for an astounding truth.



A YOUNG MAN AND HIS TWO SISTERS lived in the little village of Bethany. They were close friends of Jesus, who often stayed with them when He visited Jerusalem.

One day the young man became very ill. "Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha... Therefore the sisters sent to [Jesus], saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick'" (John 11:1, 3).

John describes this family as close, filled with love and peace. No doubt Christ enjoyed visiting their home and relaxing from arduous journeys. Notice that the sisters didn't even ask for Him to come. They knew that once He heard of Lazarus' illness, He would come to see His sick friend.

Martha responded that she knew Lazarus would "rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus didn't do what they expected. He deliberately waited (verses 6-7). In the meantime, the illness claimed Lazarus' life. By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead for at least four days. Martha, in her anguish, met Christ as He arrived. "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Christ responded to her grief by urging her to have faith and believe in

Him. He even told her, "Your brother will rise again" (verses 21, 23).

Martha responded that she knew Lazarus would "rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (verse 24). She was aware of the biblical promises of a coming resurrection at the end of this age. (To better understand these promised resurrections, request your free booklets *What Happens After Death?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*)

Hope of the resurrection

However, she did not understand that God would use her brother's death to glorify His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. She apparently did not believe she would ever see her brother alive again in this life.

Lazarus come forth

Jesus again offered her encouragement. "I am the resurrection and the life," He told her. "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

She responded positively to some of what Jesus said: "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (verses 25-27). She may have been unsure about the rest of His meaning or what He was driving at. Regardless, she summoned her sister Mary, who was still mourning in their house.

When Mary came, "Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, 'Where have you laid him?'" (verses 33-34).

As was often done at that time, Lazarus' friends and family interred him in a cave. They then covered its entrance with a large rock to keep out predators. Christ told those present to remove the stone that covered the mouth of the cave. Martha objected that Lazarus' body would have already begun to decay.

Jesus persisted, so "they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying" (verse 41). After a short prayer to His Father, Christ, in a loud voice, shouted, "Lazarus, come forth!"



From within the dark cave came the sounds of movement—and shortly the figure of a man struggling to walk appeared at the entrance. He was struggling because his body was still wrapped in the strips of linen cloths in which he had been interred!

"And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Loose him, and let him go.' Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him" (verses 44-45).

Word of this remarkable event quickly reached the religious authorities in Jerusalem. Perceiving Jesus as a threat to their

positions and the stability of the area, they plotted to do away with Him. Little did anyone realize the stage was being set for another death and resurrection.

An innocent man crucified

Around 3 o'clock on the afternoon of Passover day, the wishes of the hostile crowd were fulfilled. Jesus' life was ended with the upward thrust of a Roman soldier's spear. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two less-well-known disciples, quickly went into action. Both of these men believed Jesus' teachings, yet they kept it secret out of fear of what their fellow Jews might do to them.

Perhaps they were ashamed of their earlier reticence. But now they showed the courage to step forward and claim the body of Jesus Christ and begin preparing it for proper, but hasty, entombment. It was Joseph of Arimathea, who went to Pilate and asked for Christ's body and offered his own new tomb as a place of burial. Nicodemus helped and contributed a vast amount of costly spices for His burial.

Since it was already around 3 o'clock in the afternoon, there was not much time before the "high day" (John 19:31), one of seven biblical annual Sabbaths (Leviticus 23), began. They had much to do before sunset, at which time all work would cease to honor the Sabbath. Perhaps these two wealthy men had servants who helped with the many things that would need to be done in the short time remaining.

"Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day [for the Sabbath], for the tomb was nearby" (John 19:40-42).

Jewish burial practices

Because of the hot climate and religious customs, the Jews of that day would bury their dead very quickly. They practiced neither cremation nor the Egyptian practice of embalming.

The poor would simply bury their dead in the ground, covering the grave with earth and stones. Others would use caves as a resting place for their dead, as happened with Lazarus. Those who could afford to would carve tombs in the sides of the many hills and mountains of the area. Such tombs would typically have several shelves carved in the stone on which the bodies of family members would be laid.

The body would normally be washed and then wrapped in a clean linen cloth or strips of cloth, similar to the way Egyptians wrapped their mummies. Families that were better off financially would put perfumes, ointment and spices on the body and between the wrappings of cloth. In some cases the spices and ointments would be thick enough to cause the outer cloths in time to harden somewhat like a cocoon.

Myrrh is specifically mentioned as being used in the preparation of Christ's body. Myrrh is a very nice-smelling resinous substance from several types of trees in Arabia and North Africa. Usually a separate piece of cloth would be used to wrap the head of the deceased. If the death occurred just before a Sabbath, it was especially important that the body be taken to its resting place before the Sabbath began. They would not bury the dead on the Sabbath.

Some of the women who followed Jesus also made plans to buy spices for the preparation of Christ's body. They took note of His burial place and went to their homes to rest on the Sabbath. Again, this Sabbath was a high day (John 19:31), in this case the first day of Unleavened Bread, which fell on a Thursday that year. When the annual Sabbath was over, on the next day, Friday, they went into the city to purchase the spices and oils.

Mark mentions that the women bought the spices after the Sabbath, and Luke states they prepared the spices before the Sabbath.

"And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid. Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him" (Mark 15:47-16:1).

They spent the remaining time on this Friday preparing the spices for the anointing of Christ's body. "Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56).

Notice Mark mentions that the women bought the spices *after* the Sabbath and Luke states they prepared the spices *before* the Sabbath. There is no contradiction when we realize that there are two Sabbaths involved in this three-day period. After resting on the weekly Sabbath, Saturday, they went as early as possible to the tomb the next day. (To better understand the timing of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection—which were not on Friday and Sunday—request our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*)

An astounding discovery

When the women arrived at the tomb, they discovered the stone cover had been rolled back and the tomb was empty! They rushed to inform the other disciples. When they returned and saw the evidence of what had happened, they realized Jesus Christ had indeed been raised to a new life exactly as He had said would happen.

But what was this evidence? The most astounding discovery was not the empty tomb, nor the announcement of an angelic being that "He is not here, He has risen!" It was something else. Among the Gospel writers, only John records what that was. Let's read it in John 20.

"Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the entrance, and ran to Simon Peter, and the other disciple [John], the one whom Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,' she said, 'and we do not know where they have laid him.'

"So Peter and the other disciple set out and made their way to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. He peered in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not enter. Then Simon Peter caught up with him and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the napkin which had been round His head, not with the wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed" (verses 1-8, Revised English Bible).

What Peter and John saw instantly convinced them not only that His body had not been stolen, but also that God the Father had raised Jesus to glory and immortality!

What did the disciples see that made them believe? It wasn't simply an

empty tomb. If the body had been stolen, as Mary had assumed, all they would have seen was an empty tomb.

But there was more. Christ had told them several times that he would die and rise again, but it hadn't sunk in. What Peter and John saw instantly convinced them not only that His body had not been stolen, but also that God the Father had raised Jesus to glory and immortality (Acts 3:13-15)!

Powerful evidence left behind

Christ's wrapped body had been laid on a rock shelf in the tomb. Yards of linen cloths had been wrapped around His body. Spices and thick myrrh were placed inside those wrappings, essentially pasting them together. What Peter and John saw as they peered into the dimness of the man-made cave was a neat, collapsed cloth form. If someone had removed Jesus' body, if tomb robbers had been at work, why should they leave these wrappings?



No tomb robber would have taken the time to laboriously unwrap the body and leave the burial cloths there—especially since they would have been in danger of being discovered by the guards the Roman authorities had posted there to prevent that very thing (Matthew 27:62-66; 28:11-15).

But there was more. The cloths were not scattered all around—they were *still wrapped*. This resurrection was not like Lazarus', in which he was restored to live a few more years and would eventually die again. This was the resurrection of a *spirit* body (see 1 Corinthians 15:44).

What John saw made a profound impression on him. The grave-clothes were not disheveled and disarranged, as would have been the case if someone had removed them or someone had struggled to free himself from the wrappings. The original Greek wording means they were lying there *still in their folds,* the clothes for the body where the body had been and the "napkin," a smaller, separate piece of cloth, where the head had lain.

The whole point of John's description is that the grave clothes did not look as if they had been put off or taken off. They were lying there in their regular folds as if the body of Jesus *had simply evaporated out of them*. The sight suddenly penetrated John's mind. He realized what had happened—and he believed. It was not what Jesus had said so often that convinced him that Jesus had risen. It was what he saw with his own eyes!

John's convincing details

Notice this comment from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* about Jesus' head covering being "wrapped together in a place by itself" there in the tomb (John 20:7, King James Version): "'Wrapped together' might suggest that this cloth had been 'rolled' or wrapped up and put in a certain part of the tomb at the Lord's resurrection, whereas, as with the body wrappings, the head cloth was lying as it had been 'rolled' round His head, an evidence, to those who looked into the tomb, of the fact of His resurrection without any disturbance of the

wrappings either by friend or foe or when the change took place" (W.E. Vine, 1985, "Roll"). Jesus' glorified body had passed right through the cloth!

This resurrection was not like Lazarus', in which he was restored to live a few more years and would eventually die again.

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,* in its article "Resurrection of Jesus Christ," states: "Significantly, the grave clothes were undisturbed... Long ago, Chrysostom pointed out that the grave robbers would not have stolen the body naked because of time restraints and other difficulties ('it was buried with much myrrh, which glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead. [Hom. 85 on Jn. 4]). The Gospels describe an orderly scene, not one of confusion that would have resulted had the grave clothes been torn from the body. That something extraordinary had taken place is shown by the fact that the beloved disciple 'saw and believed'" (1988, Vol. 4, p. 151).

In a footnote on John 20:7, the Companion Bible explains that John's original wording "implies that the cloth had been folded round the head as a turban is folded, and that it lay still in the form of a turban. The linen clothes also lay exactly as they were when swathed round the body. The Lord had passed out of them, not needing as Lazarus ([John] 11:44), to be loosed. It was this sight that convinced John (v. 8)."

We can share in Christ's resurrection

The apostle John recorded significant and important differences in these two resurrections. In the first, the stone covering of the tomb was removed so that Lazarus could get out. The stone covering of the other was rolled back not so Jesus could get out, but so that the disciples could see in and witness that Jesus had already gotten out!

Of the two who were entombed, the first had to have others remove the wrappings so he could walk about. The other did not, for He had *passed through His wrappings* in a body of spirit.

Later John made it clear that Christ's true followers will *likewise* be resurrected, that they will be like Him in a glorious resurrection to immortal spirit life: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!... Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:1-3).

Recommended reading

Would you like to better understand Jesus Christ's sacrifice and role in our salvation? What about the ultimate destiny you can have with Him? Read our free booklets *You Can Have Living Faith*, *What Is Your Destiny?* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

What's My Purpose Here?

By Gary Petty

There must be some meaning to humanity's mixture of awesome abilities and awful atrocities. What is the ultimate purpose and meaning for your life?



"WHAT WOULD YOU ASK A GOD or supreme being if you could get a direct and immediate answer?" A poll in USA Today reports that the number one response by adults was "What's my purpose here?"

For all our modern technology and sophistication, we haven't solved the basic question of what is the purpose and value of each human life. It seems Henry David Thoreau's observation that most people "lead lives of quiet desperation" is all too true.

Where would you start to discover the purpose for your life? Can it be found in psychological testing or philosophy? Aptitude tests might help you pinpoint your abilities. Personality evaluations might help you find unique aspects of who you are. It's clear the social sciences can't answer the question of the purpose of our existence.

The place to begin

The complexity and interdependency of nature around us, the miracle of life itself, reveals a Lifegiver—a Creator. Would it make sense that a brilliant Lifegiver would create intelligent beings without purpose? "What's my purpose here?" can ultimately only be answered by the Creator of life.

Western society claims to have its roots in Christianity, yet the last place many people search to find purpose in life is the Bible. The Bible reveals a special creation with a special purpose. The

first book of the Bible is Genesis, simply meaning "beginning." The Bible's first sentence is, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Brain size and biology can't explain humanity's uniqueness.

God then created a unique biological being called man. Genesis 2:7 states, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

Does this mean that humankind is just another animal, different in form, but essentially the same as a chimpanzee or other higher mammal?

The theory of evolution would bring us to that conclusion, but evolution doesn't explain the obvious differences between humanity and other higher forms of animals. How do we explain the human ability to create music and art, to perform geometry, develop architecture or invent complex forms of communication?

Instinct and intellect

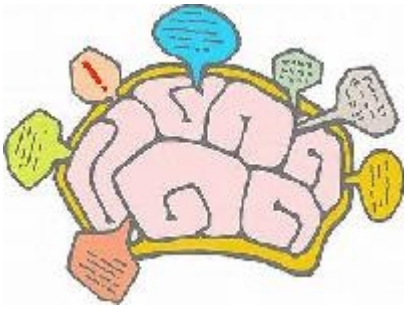
A slug or a spider is driven entirely by instinctual behavior. The more complex the life form, the more it can "learn." Yet the behaviors of even the highest forms of animals are primarily instinctive. This isn't true of humanity.

Man possesses a nonphysical component called a "spirit" that imparts individuality, intellect, creativity and personality.

Mortimer J. Adler, in his book *Ten Philosophical Mistakes,* makes the point that if we compare other animals with man, "a radical difference appears. In the strict sense of the term *instinct,* the human species has no instincts—no innate, performed patterns of behavior. We have a small number of innate reflexes, only some of which are congenital. We also have what might be called instinctual drives or impulses. But in carrying these impulses out, members of the human species behave in a wide variety of ways. They do not all manifest a single pattern of behavior, such as we find in all members of a particular species of bee, ant or termite" (1985, p. 31).

This ability to reason and make complex decisions and choose various courses of action makes human beings infinitely different from any other biological animal on the earth. The differences between the quality or quantity of the human brain and the brains of mammals aren't sufficient to explain the vast differences in function. Some mammals actually have larger brains than humans.

The difference between animals and human beings is the ability to reason, to create, to communicate emotions, to experience love and empathy. These are all aspects of what we call the mind.



Mortimer J. Adler concludes: "The relation of the sensory powers to the brain and nervous system is such that the degree to which an animal species possesses these powers depends on the size and complexity of its brain and nervous system. This is not the case in regard to the intellectual powers. That the human mind has such powers does not depend upon the size or complexity of the human brain. The action of the brain is only a necessary, but not the sufficient, condition for the functioning of the human mind and for the operations of conceptual thought. We do not think with our brains, even though we cannot think without them" (pp. 52-53).

What is the human mind?

Brain size and biology can't explain humanity's uniqueness. So what creates the differences?

Once again we turn to the Bible. In the creation account we see that God created each animal "according to its kind," but human beings are in the "image" and "likeness" of God (Genesis 1:24-28).

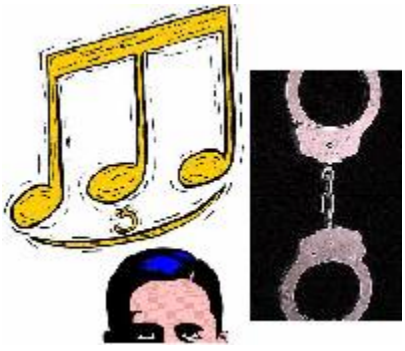
Creativity, positive emotions, logic, love, abstract thought, communication skills—these are all aspects of the mind of the Creator! These are ways in which we are created in His likeness.

Notice what the Bible says in Job 32:8: "But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding." One of the biblical prophets, Zechariah, declares that God "forms the spirit of man within him" (Zechariah 12:1).

Mankind and animals are both living "souls," or beings. Both are subject to death—the cessation of life. The difference is that man possesses a nonphysical component called a "spirit" that imparts individuality, intellect, creativity and personality.

The Bible reveals the mystery science can't solve. We are physical, chemical beings with a non-biological component—a spirit—a mind that is in a very limited way like the mind of the Creator. But, if human beings are like God in so many astonishing ways, why can't we solve our own problems?

An incomplete creation



Why are human beings capable of writing inspiring music and also capable of committing terrible crimes against each other? We research into the intricate human body and create medicines that heal and at the same time produce nerve gas that will kill. We can send a rocket to explore outer space or send a missile to the other side of the earth to destroy a city.

If humankind is made in the image of God, who reveals Himself as loving, kind and merciful, then why are we so filled with hatred, violence and selfishness? The answers lie in understanding that we are an *incomplete* creation.

Genesis reveals the root cause of humanity's evil. The first humans, Adam and Eve, were given freedom to choose between their Creator's instruction about life or a way simply called the "knowledge of good and evil." They chose the knowledge of good *and* evil.

God told Adam and Eve that once they started on the course of self-determination, they would suffer death. Evil—what the Bible calls sin—brings about death. Human history is a story of good and bad, of incredible potential and incredible failure. It is also a story of death. It seems that humanity's destiny is to struggle, suffer and eventually die.

Central to the Christian religion is the belief that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God who took humanity's death penalty upon Himself. Jesus also came to supply the missing ingredient to make eternal life possible. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples He would send them another "Helper" (John 14:15-18).

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth about the missing ingredient that keeps humanity from solving its problems: "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.



"But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:7-11).

Paul wrote that mankind knows the things of mankind—reason, creativity, mathematics—because of the "spirit of man." This spirit is what makes us have similarities to God and gives us the ability to have a relationship with Him. Paul taught that to really understand the spiritual nature of God we must also receive the Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God is the missing ingredient in humanity. Without it human beings become both good and evil, lacking the wisdom to always see and choose the good. Death is the natural result. The death process must be reversed and a new nature developed in us. Peter puts it succinctly when he writes that we must become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

God's purpose for you

Humanity's problems—from agriculture to economics, education to government, family relationships to individual emotional health—are ultimately spiritual in nature. Real solutions require not just a change in environment, but a change in people.

The entirety of humanity has taken of the tree of the knowledge of both good and evil. The result is seen in the suffering of the human race. Jesus Christ came to pay the death penalty for sin. He also came to make available to people the Spirit of God, the healing, missing ingredient that will change corrupt human nature into divine nature.

What is your ultimate destiny? What awaits those who are willing to be changed by God's Spirit?

What is your ultimate destiny? What awaits those who are willing to be changed by God's Spirit from corrupted human nature to become partakers of the divine?

Paul explains in Romans 8:14-17: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit [itself] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

Become children of God

The purpose for humanity is to become the children of God! The purpose for your life is more than making money, obtaining social status or wearing the right clothes. The coupling of the human spirit with the Spirit of God makes possible the development of a new nature and eventually a resurrection to a new life as eternal children of God—joint heirs with Jesus of all things. This is the potential of every human being!

But this isn't just a future promise. The Creator says that you can have a Father-child relationship with Him now! There are real solutions to your problems. There is hope for those willing to discover their true purpose. The first step on that road of discovery is to turn to the Creator and His instruction book.

How Is Humanity Unique?

What makes us human? Consider some of the ways humankind is different from the animal kingdom.

- **Self-consciousness and intelligence.** The human mind gives us capacity for reasoned thought. Instinct isn't the driving force that determines our behavior.

  These abilities lead us to search for meaning in our personal lives as well as meaning in human life as a whole. Libraries are full of the works of authors searching for purpose in life. Every human culture produces its own religions, myths and philosophies. We even have a need to find meaning and purpose in suffering. It isn't enough for human beings to accept suffering. Even the youngest mind wants to know why the pet dog died, or why God allows people to get sick. This leads us to another unique human trait—the capacity for empathy and sharing another's suffering.

- **The ability to think and plan in time.** It's an amazing aspect of the human

achieve, set goals and organize in relation to time. When was the last time you saw a gorilla or chimp open his calendar and make an appointment?

This leads us to the capacity to conceive of our own death. From the funeral pyres of ancient civilizations to modern funerals, we are ever searching for meaning in death. We are ever searching for a hope in an afterlife. These concepts are foreign to animals.

- **Creativity.** Human beings are unique in their concepts and development of art, music and literature.

  Beavers through instinct build the same types of dams generation after generation. There isn't a raging river on the globe that mankind can't dam and use to create electricity. Our creative abilities allow us to adapt to different situations and solve new problems.

- **The ability of abstract thought.** An architect can visualize a skyscraper, draw lines on a piece of paper called a blueprint, then give the blueprint to a builder who studies those lines and constructs the vision that existed only in the mind of the architect.

  Much human learning is through the five senses. Yet the human mind stretches beyond the senses to encompass concepts like infinity, liberty, beauty and humor.

- **The ability to create languages.** Human beings comprehend connections between large numbers of words, including the ability to learn different languages, even "animal languages."
- **The capacity for scientific thought.** This includes experimentation and development of theory.
- **The ability to consciously change our environment, personality, character, habits, even physical looks.**
- **The ability to experience emotions like happiness, joy, peace and, conversely, depression and despair.**
- **The ability to conceive of morality.** Because human beings can conceive of a choice between inherently right and inherently wrong behavior, we have a capacity for a relationship with God.

Where Have All the Leaders Gone?

By Howard Davis

As Americans prepare to choose who will occupy the most powerful office on the planet, it's time to ask some crucial questions: What is a leader, and what makes a leader great?



"WHERE HAVE ALL THE LEADERS GONE?" an American talk show host recently asked his guests. His question concerned the race for the office of president of the United States. From the discussion that followed, it became apparent that most people are confused about what makes a good leader.

The world is awash with billions of people, but what is missing are true leaders who can rise above the tide to improve the human condition.

Leaders operate from a vision that influences others either for good or bad. Truly great leaders have altered the course of history. Where are the leaders who can measure up to the challenges of the 21st century? Where are the George Washingtons, the Abraham Lincolns, and the Winston Churchills of our time?

George Washington



Consider the example of George Washington. Known as the father of the nation, he inspired his men to do the impossible when he led the tattered remains of his army to victory over the British on Christmas Eve in 1776.

Even though morale was low, and his army dwindled daily from desertions, Washington led his men across the ice-clogged Delaware River and defeated the unsuspecting Hessian soldiers at Trenton, New Jersey. By this bold action the new nation was inspired to fight on.

A God-given responsibility

Washington firmly believed that the dignity of office must be considered a responsibility from God. In his mind, the duties of the presidency had to be carried out with the highest honor. Like

many other traditions he authored, Washington established the tradition of taking the oath of office with his hand on the Bible, appealing "so help me God" to faithfully uphold the laws of the United States and public trust.

Instead of garnering power to himself, he stepped aside to become the nation's first retired chief executive. In his will he stipulated that his slaves were to be freed from bondage because he had come to believe slavery was contrary to God's will.

Hitler antithesis of Washington

Adolf Hitler was perhaps the most dominant leader of the 20th century, and was the antithesis of Washington. Hitler rode a wave of German despair to manipulate his way into national leadership. With mesmerizing theatrics he pioneered the use of the new technological tools of radio, amplified sound and theatrical lighting to create a type of mass hypnosis.



By cleverly manipulating the perceptions of the German people, he was able to seize the soul of a nation with the promise of a 1,000-year Reich. What he brought was an explicit policy of mass murder, warfare and bloodshed on a scale never seen before in history. In the end, Hitler destroyed not only his own nation, but much of Europe in carrying out his mad dreams.

What does a true leader do?

The contrast between George Washington and Adolf Hitler can help us understand the qualities that distinguishes what true leadership should be. A true leader will focus on what is best for the people he leads. Leaders must be willing to sacrifice themselves for a cause greater than themselves. They should provide a vision for the people and should articulate that vision.

True leaders are not dictators. They do not derive their power from commanding people to obey their will or using coercive methods to manipulate others.

Guidebook for true leadership

Over the course of their lives both George Washington and Abraham Lincoln faced many challenges and setbacks. They found both personal inspiration and a framework for successful leadership in the pages of the Bible.



History abounds with accounts of notorious conquerors such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Constantine, Genghis Khan, Charlemagne and Napoleon Bonaparte. Volumes have been written about their exploits. Yet we often overlook another book that is the best book on leadership ever written. This book is none other than the Bible. It reveals the character of true leadership. A central focus of the Bible is its message that the entire world can be, and will be, transformed by the right kind of leadership.

It offers many examples of leaders who stood out in their generations. Noah was unique, the only "preacher of righteousness" of his day (2 Peter

2:5). He resisted evil in a world of total corruption, built an ark as a witness to a coming judgment and was a warning sign to the world for 120 years.

Joseph was an extremely capable young man who overcame adversity—including being sold into slavery and being falsely imprisoned on trumped-up charges, only to become second in command of Egypt.

The Bible describes the trials, triumphs, successes and failures of an astonishing array of leaders. Abraham, Moses and King David demonstrate standards of righteous leadership for all time. Wicked leaders are also given detailed profiles in the Bible's histories. For example, Ahab debased his kingdom by instituting Baal worship—which included child sacrifice—under the incessant manipulation of his pagan wife Jezebel.

Jesus teaches leadership

Jesus' concepts of leadership were revolutionary. They stood in stark contrast to the commonly held views of His time when He said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave" (Matthew 20:25-27).

Jesus' concepts of leadership were revolutionary. They stood in stark contrast to the commonly held views of His time.

He condemned the ruling class as "blind guides" who "outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside... are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:24, 28). He called the leaders hypocrites (verse 27), a Greek term for an actor whose true face was hidden behind a theatrical mask.

Guidelines for leaders

These biblical lessons were not lost on George Washington. For example, Washington said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

At Mount Vernon, the preserved country estate of George Washington, a statue stands in a secluded garden courtyard. Engraved on its pedestal is a quote from the book of Exodus.

"I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee... Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens" (Exodus 18:19-21, King James Version).

"Able men"

Moses selected men and women of ability and expertise. Some systems of government promote people to position of rulership because of patronage rather than merit. This has always been a problem, even in the Western democracies.

Too often people are rewarded with power based more on who they know, rather than on their abilities. Inevitably their lack of comprehensive vision and inability to articulate that vision lead to mediocre results or failure.

"Such as fear God"

The second trait in Moses' list is the fear of God. Human brilliance and ability must be tempered with a respect for the ultimate ruler of mankind, our Creator. Fear of God means the leader knows his or her place in the order of things and is willing to acknowledge the will of God for all people.

In his first inaugural address, George Washington spent a third of the speech expounding God's providence and making "fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules the universe."

"Men of truth"

Seeking the truth of God is the third leadership trait. Mature men and women of truth know how to realistically face the facts even about their own shortcomings, and to make corrections where necessary.

"Hating covetousness"

Leaders are to *hate* covetousness, which is the desire to take what does not belong to them or hold on to what is not theirs. Power and authority tend to have an intoxicating impact on leaders. Jesus told His followers that they must counteract this corrupting tendency by focusing on serving others, just as He did (Matthew 20:25-28).

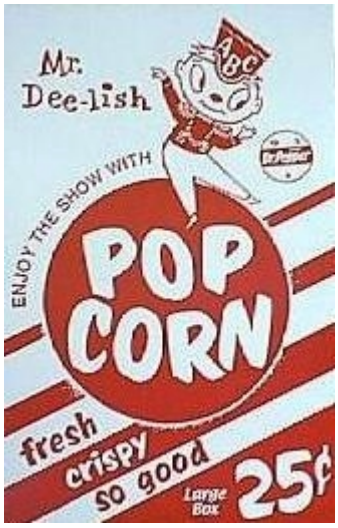
Recommended reading

You can find many principles of successful leadership—and success in all aspects of life within the pages of Bible. This guidebook for humanity is filled with advice about marriage, friendships, parenting, career, personal finances, health and much more. We've compiled many of these timeless principles in a booklet titled, appropriately enough, *Making Life Work*. We've also prepared a booklet, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, that shows how the world will be transformed under proper leadership. You can download or request these and other free booklets from our Web site at www.ucg.org.

Choosing Movies and Music: What's Going Into Your Mind?

By Larry Greider

Young people just want to have fun. But how should one decide what music to listen to and which movies to see?



"LET'S GO TO A MOVIE!" These familiar words are repeated countless times on weekend nights around the world. But which movie to see? The choices are almost endless. Science fiction, action, Westerns, comedies and love stories abound. Does it really matter which forms of entertainment we choose? And if it does, how can we apply biblical standards to our options?

Today there are some 32 million 12- to 19-year-olds in the United States alone—the largest teen generation ever, and with plenty of buying power. In 2000, U.S. teens spent an estimated $105 billion and influenced their parents to spend an additional $48 billion. So the choices made by teens are quite relevant to merchants. We've never seen a time in which so many young people have had the leisure time plus the money in their pockets to simply have fun.

Choices, choices, choices. What movie, CD or video game should I spend my money on this time? What's cool and what's going to be exciting and fun?

Not all options are good

"Most television programming is insipid, illicit, and idiotic."

It's obvious to those who've been watching TV and movies for more than a few years that they contain more violence and sex than ever before—actually, *quite a lot more*. Every major American network has a show, often in prime time, featuring a gay character, not to mention all the shows that glamorize extramarital sex. According to one author, "Most television programming is insipid, illicit, and idiotic" (Douglas Groothuis, Ph.D., "How the Bombarding Images of TV Culture Undermine the Power of Words," *Modern Reformation*, Jan.-Feb. 2001, p. 39).

Are these shows, which admittedly entertain and stimulate people, really good for you? Are the big screen's latest features appropriate for Christians to watch?

In 1940, Rhett Butler, talking angrily to Scarlet O'Hara in the cinematic blockbuster *Gone With the Wind,* appeared without his shirt and used the word "damn." Audiences across the country were shocked. This epic movie about the Civil War era was considered controversial because of this one word and an actor appearing shirtless. Today, total or partial nudity is "normal" and the use of expletives is so commonplace that some characters would have almost nothing to say if you deleted all the foul language.

Today, casual sex, often graphically depicted, is almost expected between the main characters in a majority of movies. Ratings of movies (with restrictions seldom enforced, as most teens know) have been steadily loosening—meaning less and less is being censored. Full frontal nudity, lots of blood and gore and generous quantities of vulgar profanities are not that big a deal anymore.

Media analyst Marshall McLuhan once remarked that "we become what we behold" (ibid., p. 33). And Dr. Groothuis goes on to state, "When we become habituated to a particular form of communication, our mentalities and sensibilities bear its mark" (ibid.).

Communications professor Joshua Meyrowitch complains that his students tend to have an image-based standard of truth. "If I ask, 'What evidence supports your view or contradicts it?,' they look at me as if I came from another planet" (ibid., p. 35).

Presenting the biblical perspective, the apostle Paul wrote, "Evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Is it any less true of words from a song or an image from the big screen or television? Don't we also corrupt our minds by taking in words and images that are evil?

Considerations for choices

Especially from a Christian standpoint, when we consider what we will listen to or watch, we need to ask some important questions:

- **Is this appropriate?** Are the words of the song or the plot of the movie good for me? It's true that good options are often few, even at a major multiplex with multiple theaters. To illustrate, the choices I saw recently at one multiplex included three R-rated movies (heavily laden with adult language, nudity and violence), two movies dealing with the paranormal (the spirit world, including demon possession) and one thoroughly disgusting movie that was labeled a comedy. That didn't leave much to view, which is rather sad.

  With a powerful combination of surround sound and high-definition, today's digital technologies allow for stunning imagery. It seems we get addicted to special effects, needing more and more to be thrilled. But what about the mind? We must guard this important gateway to our character and thinking.

- **Will this be uplifting and positive?** It's great to hear powerful music that lifts your spirit and makes you feel good. Recently I visited Epcot Center in Disney World. Toward the end of the day a colorful parade with puppets 20 feet high, dancers and rolling drums was accompanied by some of the most intriguing and inspiring music I've ever heard. I was so taken that I had to find the CD for my collection.



- Here is the basic principle: Music should fit the mood, but not *create* a negative or destructive one. You can select from a huge variety of music today. Clearly one should make wise choices by choosing music that inspires and uplifts, not music that creates feelings of anger, anxiety, confusion or depression or that is filled with inappropriate lyrics.
- **What are the options?** Movie ticket prices are constantly rising. And today's movies increasingly inject ideas in your mind that are not clean and pure. So, if you can't find anything worth watching, consider that it might be more fun and rewarding to do something else instead. Indeed, why not go *do* something rather than passively watching? Or get with a group and talk about ideas, plans and such things. Your imagination is the limit of things to do that are fun and creative and that can help you build friendships.

  Simply talking with good friends in a peaceful environment can also be very profitable and stimulating. Learning from others while sharing your concerns and fears can be healthy and helpful in building lasting relationships.

Watch out for the hook

Commercial companies that see the youth market as a real financial bonanza produce many of the things considered cool by today's youth. They are extremely effective at convincing millions of teens that they need their products to be considered cool and popular. Make no mistake, their main intention is to make money, not to do what's best for you.



MTV (Music Television), the popular cable- and satellite-TV channel that emphasizes popular music and sometimes seems to be one continuous commercial, does not have the purest of motives. In a PBS *Frontline* documentary titled "Merchants of Cool" (first aired in February 2000), media analyst Douglas Rushkoff spoke with teens at a concert by the group Insane Clown Posse, which has popularized a genre of music known as "rage rock."

When they were asked to describe why they found such music appealing, the teens responded that it "belongs to them"; it hadn't yet been taken from them and sold back to them in the shopping malls. Rage rock, full of profanity, violence and vulgarity, was a challenge thrown up to mass-marketers—let's see you find a way to market this!

But marketers not only accepted the challenge—they won. Rage rock has grown to be big business for them. Insane Clown Posse has become mainstream, and even bigger, equally profane acts like Eminem and Limp Bizkit have broken sales records and won Grammy nominations and other major music awards.

In the documentary, Rushkoff detailed how various teen-oriented commercial outlets orchestrated the rise of Limp Bizkit—despite the foul lyrics of the group's songs—and then relentlessly promoted them to American teenagers.

Are these outlets merely reflecting the desires of their teenage audiences?

He raised an important question: Are these outlets merely reflecting the desires of their teenage audiences or are they aggressively promoting a cultural infatuation with videos and music that glorifies illicit sex, violence and antisocial behavior and attitudes?

Rushkoff described the process as "one enclosed feedback loop." He continued, "Kids' culture and media culture are now one and the same, and it becomes impossible to tell which came first—the anger or the marketing of the anger."

In other words, marketers pitch to teens a ready-made identity of what's cool at the moment, and in so doing they often cross the lines of decency and morality. This society often sets up young people to fail.

If they aren't a pop, TV or movie star, they're made to feel they've come up short. Too often this is because many teens don't have the discernment to honestly evaluate the lifestyles of such people. Their parents have neglected to teach them the true values from the Bible. Knowledge of these biblical standards would have enabled them to make better choices.

Make wise choices

We live in fascinating and electrifying times in which young people have more free time and money than ever before. What you take into your mind is very important. The biblical King David, as a young man, was a musician and his skills were such that he was called on to calm the troubled spirit of King Saul (1 Samuel 16:23).

Many troubled teens today could use friends with such qualities to show them the way to true peace. The frenetic pace of today's world, with so many broken families and shattered lives, cries out for those who can calm troubled spirits.

If you're like most young people (and adults), media entertainment is a powerful influence in your life. Why not choose music and movies that uplift your spirit and draw you closer to God?

Recommended reading

To learn more about making good choices in life, read our booklet, *Making Life Work*. And to learn about the ultimate source of the evils in this society, read our booklet *Is There Really a Devil?*

Become Like Little Children

By Lisa Damour

Being a preschool teacher is a wonderful opportunity to see God's gentle, loving, childlike nature at work.



AS I WALK DOWN THE HALL TO MY CLASSROOM at 7:30 in the morning, I hear the familiar sounds of one of my little boys screaming. As I do, I can't help but think it's going to be one of those days. As soon as I enter the room, he runs to me with tears streaming down his little face crying, "Ms. Lisa, Ms. Lisa." After giving him a reassuring hug, I gather up the shoes he has kicked across the room and head to the kitchen to fix breakfast for the rest of our friends.

The Golden Rule



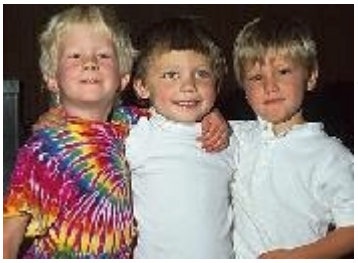
Most of the children have arrived in the classroom by midmorning. There is the customary pushing and fighting over toys or any number of other crises typical to 3- and 4-year-old children. Yes, it really is going to be "one of those days." Later, we sit down for our daily Bible lesson. Considering how our day has been going, I decide to teach about the golden rule. It's a subject we cover often, hoping something will sink in one day.

When asked what the golden rule means to them, a symphony of little voices chime in with "Treat others like you want them to treat you." We talk about how it applies to daily crises such as whether you should push someone who has pushed you. They all agree that we haven't been practicing it today. I asked what they thought we needed to do to help us

practice the golden rule. One beautiful little girl raised her hand and said, "We can pray." Wow! It caught me off guard. That was not the answer I was expecting from a 3 ½-year-old child. So, of course, that is what we did. That's when it hit me what Christ meant when He said we should become like little children.

Become childlike

To become like a child is the secret of conversion (Matthew 19:14). Little children are pure in heart and mind. Their innocence is so beautiful and refreshing. I remember when my daughter was a little girl, I told her about the golden rule and how important it is to practice it. It wasn't until years later (she is now 18) that she told me she thought that practicing the golden rule meant if someone did something to her, they wanted her to do it to them. We laugh about it now, but it demonstrates the innocence of a child's mind.



Being a preschool teacher is a wonderful opportunity to see God's gentle, loving, childlike nature at work. As adults, we have the responsibility to obey Jesus' admonition to regain that childlike attitude. Unfortunately, as our little ones grow up, they begin to lose their innocence as society encroaches in on them.

"I never want to get that old"

So what is the answer? How can we regain the childlike attitude Christ admonishes we must have? Some would argue that as children grow past the toddler stage, they lose their innocence. I don't think so. I am reminded of what a little boy told me as to why he couldn't help but be bad. "I'm always good at home, but when I get to school the bad just jumps from my shoulder into my head." There is more truth to that simple explanation then many may want to admit. Another little boy was fascinated with my age. When I told him how old I was, he said, "Wow, I don't want to get old."

Honesty is refreshing

They are not afraid to ask questions for fear of sounding stupid.

Part of their innocence is a hunger for knowledge. As adults, we may tire of their endless questions, but they are only displaying a thirst for knowledge. Take a moment to reflect on the patience that our heavenly Father shows us with our questions and requests. In children's quest for knowledge we see an honesty that is refreshing. We need to become like our children when it comes to talking to our Father. Children are not afraid to ask questions for fear of sounding stupid. Rather, they are simply attempting to add to their base of understanding as they encounter the world around them.

When my oldest son was about 5 years old, we had to board up our home and head for high ground because a hurricane was headed straight for us. We were instructed to go to the highest location in town, which happened to be a parochial school. Next morning as we were eating breakfast in the cafeteria, I noticed my son looking around the room and at a crucifix displayed on the wall. Finally he said, "Mamma, when they run out of graves, do they hang them on trees?" He knew that to find the answer he needed to ask a parental figure.

"God has lots of eyes"

How honest are we with God? Do we say what is in our hearts?

Just like children, we need to go to our spiritual Father to gain the knowledge we need to guide us in our spiritual lives. So how honest are we with God? Do we say what is in our heart? Or as we've grown older, have we lost the ability to be honest with Him and ourselves? Go to God in prayer and be completely open and honest with Him. He knows our innermost thoughts anyway. As one little girl put it, "God can see everything because He has lots of eyes."

Observe children as you have opportunity. Go to your spiritual parental figure for spiritual answers. And the next time you find yourself wondering how to regain the attitude of a little child, remember the words that my little preschool girl stated so beautifully, "We can pray."

Letters to the Editor

Hearts of Unseen Valor and Misjudged Intentions

Thank you for a well-written article on Biblical truths, well done.

The Great I AM

I really enjoyed this article. It gives me a different perspective on "I AM."

Thanks!

— Maria Jones

Much-needed encouragement

I would like to say how impressed I am by the insightful ministries of your magazine.

Great articles this month! The topic of love has been on my mind of late, so I found this month's VCM particularly timely. I especially enjoyed "Perfect Love" and "Held Together by a Spiritual Thread." We all have so much to work on individually. The articles were hopeful and provided me with some much-needed encouragement.

Thanks for all of the effort that goes into VCM!

— Sharon Swanson

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity