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When Does Life Begin?

When does a human life start? This is key to understanding why abortion is a grave sin—taking an innocent life.

God’s Word describes how the first human life began when God formed Adam and breathed into him the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). Mankind was made in God’s image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). But man was made of earth—matter—while God is spirit (John 4:24).

God describes His planned destiny for human beings in 2 Corinthians 6:18: “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” God is actually creating a family—reproducing Himself—through mankind. This is why we were created and why we are born!

So how does this take place? That spiritual process of how we become God’s children parallels the physical process of how human children are born.

God told our first human parents to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28). They did, and formed the first human family. Every human being since has been the fruit of that process God designed.

Human reproduction started with Adam. God’s divine reproduction of His family started with the second Adam, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20-22, 45-49). He was born as a human being. The big difference is that God was His Father in a unique way (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 5:18). The ovum in the womb of the young virgin Mary was miraculously fertilized by God’s divine Spirit and power, the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35).

Human life starts with an ovum or egg produced within an ovary of a potential human mother. The tiny ovum is barely large enough to be seen with the human eye. The male’s sperm are much smaller, only a fiftieth the size of the female’s ovum. When a sperm penetrates the ovum and joins with the nucleus of that cell, a human life begins.

This start of human life is exactly paralleled by the beginning of divine life as a child of God.

Within every human being is human spirit, which sets us apart as very different from animals. Research into human and animal brains has shown little physical difference between the two. Yet human beings are able to think, plan, reason, acquire knowledge and create in ways that no animal can do. The Bible reveals that within every human being exists a human spirit that sets us apart from the animal world.

Scientists for the most part ignore anything that cannot be detected or measured through physical means, so they refuse to accept the existence of spirit. As we’re told in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Sadly, in refusing to accept the existence of spirit, many scientists refuse to accept the existence of God, angels, evil spirits and the human spirit. Thus science is unable to provide answers to the great questions and issues of life.

So how, then, does the divine life, which is a parallel to human life, start?

The Bible records an astounding supernatural event that happened on the first Feast of Pentecost after Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. God’s Holy Spirit miraculously came on Christ’s followers who were gathered there in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-4).

That spirit essence and power of God, like a divine sperm cell uniting with an egg to form a human embryo, joined with their human spirit to make them newly begotten children of God! (See Romans 8:16-17.) Empowered with God’s Spirit, these men and women could now begin to understand the things of God!

As the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:9-11: “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 [by] the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except [by] the Spirit of God.”

Their receiving of the Holy Spirit was their moment of divine conception. They were now children of God—though not yet born as immortal spirit children until the resurrection at Jesus Christ’s return (1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 35-54). Now they would grow spiritually in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18) until that time of ultimate spiritual rebirth. In the meantime, those who are baptized and have received God’s Spirit are His children, partakers of His nature, though awaiting that rebirth (see 1 John 3:1-2; Romans 8:9, 14-17; 2 Peter 1:3-4).

In the same way, a child in the womb is the child of its parents from the moment of conception. So to kill an unborn child is, in the eyes of God who is the Creator of all life, murder. May we all strive to please God and recognize this horrific sin for what it is!
For more than a year the world has endured the Covid-19 pandemic and its fallout. Governments launched all-out offensives in response, including “warp-speed” vaccine development efforts and extensive stay-at-home “lockdowns” imposed on much of the world. Medical authorities called on everyone to wash their hands regularly, wear face coverings, socially distance from others and get vaccinated as soon as the opportunity arose.

This has all been trumpeted unceasingly by the media. Plus, governments everywhere spared no expense—and even amassed tremendous debt—in coping with this infection, which, at the time of this writing, is claimed to have taken the lives of more than 2.5 million people worldwide. In the United States the number is said to be more than half a million.

Yet at the same time another pandemic rages in our midst, with nearly nothing being done to stop its spread. We hear little about this wave of death, since most media outlets remain virtually silent about it—except, bizarrely enough, when opposing those who seek to halt it! Incredibly, some governments actually promote this massive loss...
of life by using taxpayers’ money to fund organizations and clinics where this lethal rampage continues.

In 2020 this terrible pandemic took the lives of nearly 43 million human beings—which is more than one death per second. This death toll is higher than all of World War I, yet it’s exacted every year. In the United States alone, deaths by this plague in 2020 outpaced Covid-19 deaths by 2,300 percent!

What is this fatal affliction? It’s the dreadful silent pandemic of abortion—far and away the world’s biggest killer.

As reported at Breitbart News: “Globally, there were more deaths from abortion in 2020 than all deaths from cancer, malaria, HIV/AIDS, smoking, alcohol, and traffic accidents combined, according to Worldometer statistics. The shocking number of deaths from abortion, in fact, has led certain observers to call abortion ‘the social justice cause of our time,’ since the sheer magnitude of the problem completely overshadows other human rights issues” (Thomas Williams, Ph.D., “Abortion Leading Global Cause of Death in 2020 With 42.7 Million Killed,” Jan. 1, 2021, emphasis added throughout).

The appalling culture of death

The abortion pandemic—this abysmal culture of death operating in plain sight—has tragically become a broadly accepted part of society. But what do most people hear from the mainstream media about the horrendous number of deaths generated by this killer? Nothing! There is only silence. Instead, most of our media, entertainment and government figures actually provide support to those who endorse, implement and participate in its fatal, gruesome work.

Of all of the world’s 195 sovereign nations, only El Salvador, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic have banned abortion completely. On the other side, abortion is so common in some countries that it’s become an integral form of birth control. For example, Foreign Policy magazine reported that “many Russian women use abortion as their sole source of birth control and official figures show almost 930,000 women terminate a pregnancy each year” (Amie Ferris-Rotman, “Putin’s Next Target Is Russia’s Abortion Culture,” Oct. 3, 2017).

LifeNews.com reported that “according to a new report by the pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute, more than half of women [in the U.S.] who had abortions between 2008 and 2014 already had at least one child” (Micaiah Bilger, “Women Using Abortion as Birth Control: 59% Already Had One Child, 33% Had Two Kids,” May 13, 2016).

Tragically, abortion—the deliberate, premeditated killing of a helpless unborn human being—has simply become another method of birth control in much of the world.

What’s behind this horrible state of affairs? As Breitbart noted, “the infamous January 22, 1973 U.S Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade . . . , together with the 1992 [ruling in] Planned Parenthood v. Casey, invalidated 50 state laws and made abortion legal and available on demand throughout the United States.”

These horrendous decisions have, since the first in 1973, brought cruel and merciless deaths to more than 64 million innocent, preborn babies in the United States alone. That’s more than the entire populations of most nations!

The tiny, most defenseless victims

And yet, that seems not to be enough death! Over the years, various efforts have been initiated to loosen or abolish restrictions to abortion laws. A recent example occurred on Jan. 22, 2019, the 46th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision.

On that day New York Governor Andrew Cuomo signed into law the Reproductive Health Act. This bill rescinded a portion of the state’s public health law by removing protections for babies born alive after an abortion—meaning these tiny, most defenseless ones among us could be left to die after birth, amounting to infanticide. This despicable law also allows for abortion through all nine months of pregnancy when the mother’s “life or health is at risk,” which can be claimed for virtually any pregnancy.

How did the mainstream media react to the signing of the New York abortion law? With utter silence! The Global Dispatch reported: “None of the major national TV networks has bothered to mention the story. This deafening silence is in stark contrast to the alarmist coverage seen when a state passes legislation that the media see as curtailing ‘abortion rights’” (Brandon Jones, “Media Avoiding Coverage of New York’s ‘Ghoulish Radical’ Abortion Law, Jan. 29, 2019).

Along with New York, five other state governments have ratified similar horrific legislation. For example, a bill passed in the Massachusetts state legislature and signed by the governor allows women to obtain an abortion anytime during the third trimester of pregnancy (28-40 weeks)—a time when babies routinely can and do survive outside the womb. National Review reported that “this lenient definition essentially allows for abortion on demand up until the moment of birth” (Alexandra DeSanctis, “Massachusetts Bill Would Allow Abortion Until Birth,” Jan. 3, 2020).

Accelerating the abysmal pace of death

The pace of death from abortion was accelerated in
A Brief History of Abortion

Abortion is not mentioned in the Bible, but history records that it was practiced by the ancient Egyptians, Persians, Romans and other civilizations. However, at that time abortion was generally regarded as immoral. For example, in the fifth century B.C. the Hippocratic Oath prohibited physicians from inducing elective abortions.

Some church fathers around the 200s wrote disapprovingly of contraceptives and drugs or devices used to cause abortion. Abortion was included in denunciations of other reprehensible conduct such as theft, perjury, pride and hypocrisy.

Pilgrim and Puritan founders of Colonial America, along with Lutherans and Anglicans, saw abortion as murderous. “New England was filled with Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches founded on the doctrines of John Calvin, who wrote that an unborn child, ‘though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being and should not be robbed of the life which it has not yet begun to enjoy’” (Marvin Olasky, “Did Colonial America Have Abortions? Yes But . . . ,” World, Jan. 17, 2015, excerpted from Abortion Rites: A Social History of Abortion in America, 1992).

Abortion was long viewed as sinful and deplorable but, being extremely rare (ibid.), was not specifically legislated against in the early United States. However, beginning in the early to mid-1800s, laws forbidding abortion began appearing. By 1900 most abortions in the country were outlawed, primarily through legislative efforts promoted by the American Medical Association.

By the early 1960s public opinion about abortion began to shift following the thalidomide drug tragedy that was revealed in the late 1950s. For several years this drug had been prescribed to pregnant women for morning sickness and as a sleeping aid, but was later found to cause serious birth defects. Used widely in the United Kingdom from 1958 to 1962, thalidomide caused up to 10,000 miscarriages and infant deaths. Worldwide, an estimated 20,000 babies were maimed and 80,000 died. Although thalidomide was banned in 1961, dialog about legal abortion escalated due to the fear pregnant women had that their babies could be born with significant deformities.

From 1967 to 1970, 15 states legalized abortion for pregnancies that resulted from rape or incest or threatened the life of the mother. Then, in 1971, the infamous Roe v. Wade abortion case came to trial, and in 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court struck down all state laws regulating abortion, legalizing it throughout the country.

Sadly, abortion—the willful and deliberate taking of human life—is the leading cause of death throughout the world today. However, a magnificent time is coming when it will forever be a thing of the past—when Jesus Christ returns in power and glory to establish God’s righteous government (Daniel 2:44-45).
The Declaration of Independence declares that “all men”—meaning all human beings—“are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Yet what do we see? Each day these fundamental God-given rights are denied to thousands of growing, preborn babies whose lives are brutally terminated through the forceps, curettes, scissors, syringes and vacuums of pitiless abortionists.

But why? What happened in America that contributed to this horrendous outcome when decades earlier abortion was barely mentioned? Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s vast numbers of people in the United States rejected and turned away from its biblically rooted moral foundation. The so-called “free love” movement took root. It involved a sexually promiscuous lifestyle with many casual partners. Fueled by growing access to birth control pills, this decadence was promoted in movies, television and magazines, subverting and severely weakening the institutions of marriage and family, the very building blocks of a sound society.

This cancerous cultural degeneration has continued relentlessly to the point that today virtually any forms of sexual behavior or deviance are accepted as “normal.” And evil, human beings have formed an “anything goes” society, including in the way they approach sex. Whereas God says in Scripture that sex is reserved for only the loving, committed relationship of marriage, people have rejected that and decided they know better than the God who actually designed and created sex!

Rejecting God’s moral standards has given rise to today’s chaotic and decadent sexual hookup culture, cohabitation, the normalization of homosexuality, same-sex marriage and transgenderism. Such sinful and self-destructive behavior is condemned in the Bible (see Matthew 5:28; Leviticus 18:22; Deuteronomy 22:5; Romans 1:26-29; Genesis 5:2).

Should it be any wonder that the appalling “abortion on demand” culture has accompanied this depravity? Tragically, cultures throughout the world have descended into the degradation of murdering their most innocent and vulnerable members. And for what? So other people can serve their own decadent, self-indulgent pleasures (see 2 Timothy 3:1-5).

**A unique life at conception**

Far too many people have bought into the awful lie that an unborn baby is simply an “unviable mass of tissue” and that the mother therefore has the “right” to do with it as she pleases. Another falsehood is that human life doesn’t begin until sometime near birth when the baby would be viable on its own. Here abortionists try drawing the line at self-sufficiency. They tell women that since the fetus depends on the mother for life support and cannot survive apart from her, an abortion is perfectly acceptable if the mother so desires.

But what’s clear from science, and as well as from what
God tells us, that human life begins at conception. At that point a unique life comes into existence with its own genetic code, comprising everything this miniature person will become—from height, the color of eyes, personality and so much more.

An amazing process of rapid growth and development then takes place in this new human life in the mother’s womb. Within only 18 days a heartbeat is evident. At about three weeks, the baby’s eyes, spinal cord and digestive system begin forming. At around 43 days, brain waves can be detected. By about 60 days, fingers and toes are beginning to show. At around 65 days the thyroid and adrenal glands function and the embryo can swallow and respond to noise.

By 70 days the preborn baby has basically everything a newborn baby does. At 84 days fingerprints are forming. The little boy or girl is now more than three inches long and weighs about an ounce. By 125 days, he or she is moving and kicking. The pre-born infant responds to pain, touch, cold, sound and light, gets hiccups, can suck its thumb, passes through waking and sleeping cycles, can smile, express emotions, can respond to its mother’s voice, yawns and even dreams!

What does our Creator say?

The Bible explains that God views the preborn infant as a separate individual from its mother. For example, God specified that long before the prophet Jeremiah was born, God selected him for a special commission. God told Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). Additionally, the patriarch Job said regarding himself and others: “Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One fashion us in the womb?” (Job 31:15).

We see, then, that the inspired Word of God shows that our Creator regards the preborn baby, even at the earliest moment of its life and development, as a uniquely new and precious individual. He or she has the right, like everyone else, to live—to play, smile, laugh, learn and dream! So, while abortion is not directly addressed in Scripture, the passages above clearly show that God considers unborn infants as individual human beings. This means that the deliberate killing of a preborn baby is murder, which is prohibited by the sixth of God’s Ten Commandments.

Let’s now take this to an even higher level—beyond the physical. Just how spiritually significant and momentous is every human being to our Eternal Creator? Although He created all things, including the entire universe and everything in it, did you know that what He is making of human beings is without doubt His greatest creation?

In fact, God’s intention for human life is the principal focus of the amazing and remarkable divine plan He has prepared. Consider these inspiring words of King David of ancient Israel:

“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen—even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea . . . ” (Psalm 8:3-8).

Also, ponder the following New Testament passage which, in commenting on these words, offers a fuller explanation of humanity’s astounding destiny:

“For in subjecting all things to him [that is, to man], He [God] left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:8-10, New American Standard Bible).

The awesome divine purpose of human life

So, as we just read, Jesus Christ’s great mission is to bring “many sons to glory.” But what does that mean? God’s astounding intention and purpose in creating human beings is to produce His very own divine family. He makes this remarkable statement in 2 Corinthians 6:18: “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” He will accomplish this through a process whereby physical flesh-and-blood individuals will be transformed into spirit beings in a resurrection from the dead.

The act of human reproduction is a physical parallel to the spiritual process leading to the birth of divine children into God’s immortal spirit family! When human beings terminate the life of a preborn child, they foolishly and irreverently step in the way of God’s divine plan. Consequently, the lives of all preborn babies must be regarded as supremely valuable. God planned for every one of them to have a magnificent future destiny without parallel! (See ”When Does Life Begin?” on page 4.)

With all this in mind, if you know someone who’s thinking about aborting her baby, we earnestly request that you direct her to this article and others in this magazine and suggest that she seek dependable,godly counsel. The United Church of God, the publisher of Beyond Today magazine, has ministers throughout the world who will gladly offer spiritual guidance. Please visit our website to find a congregation or office nearest you.

Our great Creator desires that all of us thoroughly reject the ways of this world’s culture of evil and death—which is powerfully influenced by dark, deceptive, unseen spiritual forces (see Ephesians 2:2; 6:12; 2 Corinthians 11:14). Considering the growing evil of the times we live in, it’s crucial that we fully turn our lives over to God through Jesus Christ and diligently follow His perfect, life-changing teachings (Matthew 5:19).

Finally, if in the past you made the choice to end a pregnancy, please know that your caring, compassionate Heavenly Father offers you forgiveness and tremendous hope! His divine grace is available to you when you reach out to Him in sincere repentance.

You can leave your past wrongs behind and build a wonderful life today in preparation for a radiant future in His coming Kingdom—all based on the truth and wisdom God makes available to you through the Bible.

Yes, our awesome Creator has an exciting plan and purpose for all people—including you! Indeed, you have the marvelous promise of an incomparably full and joyous divine life in His spiritual family. In the meantime let’s remember that all human life, including the lives of every preborn child, is supremely and infinitely precious to Him!

Our Creator has an exciting purpose for all of us. The lives of all people and every preborn child are supremely and infinitely precious!
While working in a pro-life pregnancy center, I was often asked to speak to church groups and share the mission of our center and make an appeal for volunteers. One Mother’s Day I was asked to speak to such a group. I always took these opportunities to share my own story because I wanted to put a face on the other victims of abortion. Not only do we need to focus on the babies we hope to save but also on those women who are among the many millions who have had an abortion.

Living with a painful secret

I told the congregation that morning that when I became pregnant at the age of 16, my family made an adoption plan for the baby. Once the adoption was complete, it was never spoken of again, and the turmoil I had inside was never addressed. I acted out in all kinds of self-destructive ways and found myself pregnant again at age 18.

There was no way on earth I would confess this to my parents, my siblings or anyone else. I did have the fleeting hope that the father of the baby would want me and want this baby, but that was a fruitless dream. The father of my baby drove me to the abortion mill, and I sacrificed my child on the altar of self-preservation.

I also shared with the congregation that morning that I had spent 30 years suffering in silence over that abortion, bathed in shame and self-hatred. I told them how I credited to God the aching in my heart that finally led me to the pro-life pregnancy center where I now worked. In that center, I was finally able to admit to another human being what I had done. The floodgates were opened, and the healing process began. At last I was able to pray specifically to God about my sin, repent of that sin and seek His forgiveness.

In speaking that Mother’s Day morning, I urged anyone who needed help and healing from their own abortion experience to call me. As was often the case, no one asked for help—that is, until one year later. That’s when I received a letter from Amy, who had been in the congregation that morning.

In her note she told me how stunned she was at what I had shared. She said that it felt as if I had been appealing directly to her. She asked to meet me and go through our abortion-recovery study. Amy’s story was different from mine, but our years of shame and silence are all too familiar.

Usually by the time women seek help, they have spent months or years wallowing in shame, regret, denial, anger, guilt and self-loathing. They only came to our center when the pain was acute, when they could no longer live with the horrible secret they carried.

I have come to believe that no woman can escape the pain of an abortion. Someday, all who’ve undergone it must come face to face with the reality of the abortion. Whether they were aware or not, God’s most sacred law was violated. “Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight” (Psalm 51:4).

Both women and men have shared with me how they spent years trying to justify the abortion, punishing themselves and others, being emotionally unstable, drinking to excess or doing drugs, having nightmares, ruining one relationship after another, emotionally smothering the children they did have or rejecting them, refusing to forgive others and, perhaps most astonishing of all, having multiple abortions. The world told them that abortion was legal, quick, safe and the only way to get on with the life they deserved. They believed the lies and became part of the millions who suffer after abortion.

Debilitating stress

What they experience is a stress reaction to life-changing trauma and loss. It has been described as Post-Abortion Stress or Post-Abortion Syndrome (PAS). The onset of PAS can occur at any time from immediately after the abortion to years later. It involves the inability to express feelings about the pregnancy and subsequent abortion. They are unable to resolve the losses due to the abortion and come to any kind of inner peace.

PAS does not discriminate; it affects both women and men and can develop in those who consciously made the choice or those who were forced or coerced into the abortion.
The victims of PAS get the message: "Don't talk about it. Don't think about it. Get over it and get on with your life!" A Christian woman may believe she can never find forgiveness from the sin of abortion and so she keeps her secret from family, friends and her church. She lives in fear that someone will find out and struggles with all the consequences of the abortion (both emotional and physical) alone.

Pro-choice advocates stress the importance of a woman's choice: "her body, her choice." They insist that abortion is the best decision in certain circumstances. The existence of PAS and any feelings of loss are denied, because to acknowledge that there was a loss is to admit something of value was destroyed. That's an issue the pro-choice advocates cannot face.

Until there is a crack in the wall of denial, or until she finds safe help, a woman is stuck. Much like a cancer left untreated, PAS continues to grow. Likewise, PAS must be dealt with so that healing can take place.

Replacing lies with truth

I would summarize the abortion-recovery process in this way: replacing lies with truth. The center where I served used a Bible-based study that focused first of all on God, His Word, His law and then on how His law had been violated by our actions. Each lie we believed would be carefully held up to the light of His Word and replaced with truth. Rather than feeling shamed and worthless, God became our source of courage. All of this is done in safety and confidentiality and with great care and love. No more solitary sorrow.

Amy, who I mentioned above, had this story to share. She got pregnant at age 14. Being completely naive, she ignored her body's symptoms. Eventually her mother realized Amy was pregnant and was relentless to find someone who would "get rid of it." She drove her to Wichita, Kansas, to abortionist George Tiller, one of the few performing late-term abortions at the time (who was later shot and killed over that practice).

He performed a late-term abortion on 14-year-old Amy. After the two-day ordeal, Amy's mother made it known they would never speak of it again. Was it any wonder that Amy went on to have serial relationships and subsequent abortions?

But that's not the end of the story. Amy completed our multiweek abortion-recovery study and found real healing for her grief and loss. She was able to forgive her mother and herself and all those who were involved in her abortions. She went on to become an advocate for others who were in need of abortion recovery.

I have spoken mostly about women in this article, but the truth is that many men are affected as well. A man once shared with me how devastated he had been when his girlfriend told him several weeks into her pregnancy that she’d decided to abort. He had cowardly said, "I’ll support your decision."

He told me that afterwards he had spent decades cutting himself off from any kind of female relationship and was haunted by the fact: “There was a baby—and then there was not.” He eventually did find an abortion-recovery group for men where he began his healing process and has since been involved in the abortion-recovery movement.

You are not alone

No one needs to face this alone. If you are suffering from your own abortion or that of a loved one, please reach out to someone who will help. I am humbled by the number of truly caring organizations that offer help and healing to men and women who grieve after abortion. Please reach out today.

The abortion-recovery study I’ve used is SaveOne Abortion Recovery: (615) 636-2654 or saveone.org. They have many chapters worldwide.

AfterAbortion.org has numerous resources for everyone, including shared testimonies.

RamahInternational.org provides resources to those considering or navigating life after abortion. Their most recent resource is for healing abortion’s heartache in grandparents. They have centers in countries around the world.

H3Helpline.org offers help for abortion recovery to women and men: (866) 721-7881.

Feel free to talk with our ministry as well—or you can contact me personally. You can reach me by email at lorrainebarnett23@gmail.com or info@ucg.org.
A teen girl walked into the pregnancy resource facility where I once volunteered. Her face was deeply etched with emotional pain, and her demeanor spoke of suffering and stress. Our mission was to support mothers with untimely pregnancies—so the scenario was not an unusual one. But before there was any opportunity to address the grief-stricken girl, a woman stridently pushed through the door and walked to the front desk. Her face also told a story—a story of resentment and anger. She asked for her daughter “to be seen right away!”

Unbeknown to us at the time, despite the building’s signage being perfectly clear, her mother mistakenly thought she had taken her daughter to an abortion clinic. Her daughter was indeed “seen right away,” and staff assisted her through the normal process where she ultimately heard her baby’s heartbeat. The sound of the heartbeat altered the scenario from “a problem” to a baby—and not just any baby, but her baby.

You can imagine the ensuing tension when she emerged from the room. She wanted her baby! Heartbeats never lie. Heartbeats tell of the life within the womb. However, the girl’s mother vowed the pregnancy would not continue—insisting this was not a baby, it was a mistake. The girl was terse in her response, accusing her mother of fearing the shame of neighbors and their church learning about the pregnancy. In a flash she was whisked out the door and driven to an abortion facility, which had been her mother’s intent all along.

I don’t know the rest of the story, but I do know that in trying to erase the problem, the resulting tragedy would have unintended consequences that would likely last a lifetime.

After many years I still recall the expression imprinted on the girl’s face. If only her mother had stopped for just a moment to look beyond her own disgrace to truly see, she too would have grasped what the rest of us saw carved all over her daughter’s demeanor—anguish, torment and possibly irreconcilable damage to their relationship.

This story demonstrates how easily emotions can surge and overwhelm people confronted by an unintended pregnancy, pushing them to consider desperate measures.

The unintended pregnancy

Daughters and sons, moms and dads, if you find yourself caught in a similar predicament, consider some “moral plumb line” principles prior to making hasty decisions born of shame or the prospect of altered life plans. Also understand that my intent is not to dredge up bygone pain lingering in those who mourn past choices. To you, I simply remind you of Jesus Christ’s redemptive sacrifice that makes it possible for you to forge ahead anew.

If you contact a pro-choice clinic contemplating abortion, realize the solutions presented will speak to every...
My Daughter Wants to Get an Abortion—What Do I Do?

Knowing abortion violates God’s law against murder, you are distressed to see your daughter making such a choice. What can you do? What should you do?

Consider this advice from the apostle Paul: “If another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path” (Galatians 6:1, New Living Translation).

This lays out the approach you should take with your daughter. Though you could never condone her deciding to get an abortion, do not condemn her. Christ Himself said, “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17).

Be thankful she has let you know what she’s thinking. There is still hope she will decide against an abortion. Now is your opportunity to let her see God’s character in you, as you gently and humbly try to help her make the right choice.

Now would be a good time to pray, asking God for help and grace to speak with love to your daughter. Pray for an opportunity to let her see God’s character in you, as you gently and humbly help her make the right choice.

Now is your opportunity to let her see God’s character in you, as you gently and humbly help her make the right choice.

If circumstances will not allow raising a child, consider what a blessed gift adoption would bring to another family. As has been said, “There is no such thing as an unwanted child; there are only ‘unwanting parents.’”

Recognize the inspiration others find in those who choose to do the right thing even when it’s the hard thing. When you step up to the plate, you encourage others to do the same. Your choice today can be a shining example single one of your fears and offer a fix that promises to erase them all—and what a temptation this is when complicated thoughts and emotions rage within. “Stop, look and listen” before you cross this road. Stop—control your emotions instead of letting your emotions control you. Look—at all options and visualize how you might feel 15 years from now about your decision. Listen—to Scripture (Numbers 32:23), because sin always has consequences.

The apostle Paul wrote, “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). Likewise, you must lead your daughter to the right choice without forcing your will on her.

When your daughter tells you she intends to abort her baby, it can be an upsetting and emotional moment. You know it’s wrong, and she may also have her doubts about her decision. But be thankful she has come to you with this news. This is an opportunity to let God’s love and mercy shine in you. With prayer and the help of His Spirit, you can be of great comfort and help to your daughter, as you seek to rescue her and her baby. Showing deep care and loving concern, you may help her see that having an abortion is not what God wants her to do—and that He will support her in her choosing to follow His will.

You cannot force your daughter to make the right choice, the choice for life. You can gently guide her, but you can never make the choice for her. Whatever choice she makes, take comfort in the knowledge that God is in control of all things and is deeply merciful. Those who’ve sinned can still seek and find forgiveness. And in His Kingdom, life will be restored to those deprived of it. He will ultimately right every wrong and “wipe away every tear” from our eyes (Revelation 21:4). The sinful practice of abortion will no longer be an ugly stain on the world. All the peoples of the earth will know the high value God puts on life. May God’s Kingdom come soon! This is one of hundreds of Bible questions and answers on our website. To find more, search for “Bible questions” at ucg.org.
Churches and the abortion problem

In 2015 the non–profit organization Care Net commissioned a national study within America. The research found abortion to be “a significant problem within churches across the country and most women who have had abortions do not view the church as a place that provides help for women facing unplanned pregnancies.”

Confusion and misunderstandings often occur over the definitions of terms. What does “pro-life” mean? What does “pro-choice” mean?

Let’s consider these words from a biblical viewpoint.

To say God is pro-life is an understatement. God is the Creator, Sustainer and Protector of life. One of His Ten Commandments prohibits taking life (Exodus 20:13). God is also pro-choice in the sense that He created human beings with freedom of choice. He does not control us in a way that robs us of the freedom to choose our own way.

Human life is an ongoing series of choices. But not all choices are equal. There are wise and foolish, good and bad, and right and wrong choices. Some would have us believe that one choice is as good as another and merely a matter of personal preference.

Such thinking is based on the idea that there are no absolutes. But there is absolute truth. The Bible is God’s revelation of ultimate truth. Jesus Christ said in prayer to God the Father, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). The Ten Commandments summarize God’s standards of right and wrong. God doesn’t force His standards on anyone. He does, however, reveal what is right, show some of the consequences for our actions and exhort us to choose what is right. But then He leaves it up to us to choose.

For example, God instructed Adam and Eve, forewarned them of consequences and allowed them to make their own choice—and then they paid the penalties for their wrong decision. God inspired Joshua to tell the Israelites, “. . . Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” — whether the false gods of the pagans around them or the one true God (Joshua 24:15). In Isaiah 65:12 God pronounces judgment on the Israelites “because, when I called, you did not answer . . . but did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight.”

For unborn babies, parents should choose life rather than death. Abortion is the wrong choice. God is pro-life. He abhors people of their own will taking the lives of others, including killing unborn babies.

The terms pro-life and pro-choice have taken on additional meaning in many countries. Politically speaking, pro-life refers largely to people seeking legislation and the help of courts to outlaw or restrict abortion. Pro-choice refers largely to people seeking the opposite—to remove restrictions on abortion.

Though God is pleased with the goal of saving babies, one must not assume God approves of all tactics, especially when they involve physical harm or destruction of property.

Human efforts and legislation will not be the ultimate solution for the evil of abortion or any of the other evils of society. What this world so desperately needs is a change of the human heart from selfishness to selflessness, from carnality to caring. What we need is a change from spiritual blindness to a clear understanding of right values.

Rather than a philosophy of hedonism (“If it feels good, do it”), we need to consider the long-term results of sexual promiscuity—rampant venereal diseases, broken homes, shattered relationships, drug abuse, suicide and, yes, the continuing slaughter of the innocents conceived from such unions. They have certainly done nothing to deserve some of the most nightmarish deaths one could imagine.

We desperately need to learn God’s perspective of right and wrong. For most of mankind, this will not happen until Jesus Christ returns to establish His Kingdom on earth.

In all our thinking, God encourages us to choose life—life in general as well as the way that leads ultimately to eternal life. He tells us, “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19, emphasis added).

—Don Hooser
“Supportive responses from the church are key, [Life-Way Research vice president Scott] McConnell said. ‘For most women with an unwanted pregnancy, if nobody is willing to say, ‘We’re going to help you through this,’ it’s hard for them to rationally say they should keep the child.’”

Fundamental lessons from a biblical example

Take a moment to read 2 Samuel 11-12. After you’ve done so, contemplate the following:

- Compounding a bad decision with another bad decision is never a good idea. Be aware of the progressive component of sin—i.e., sin that isn’t repented of often leads to more and worse sins—and halt the destructive cycle.

- Seek godly counsel. It cannot be emphasized enough just how much you need a sounding board during this time of vulnerability. Seek out a supportive family member, pastor or trusted mentor—one who will bring calm, spiritual perspective and accountability to the table. If only King David and Bathsheba had done just that!

- What you’ve already done doesn’t have to dictate what you do next. Be courageous and make the next choice a step in the right direction. Sometimes what presents itself as an “easy way out” of the short-term difficult circumstances becomes the hardest way forward in the long term.

- The real choice before you is to either refuse or accept responsibility for your choices. In King David’s case, the escalating chaos ended only when he acknowledged his sins, repented and took responsibility for his mistakes.

- Turning to God in confession of sins and repentance doesn’t mean we escape consequences, but it does begin our moral reset and the path to true healing and peace.

- Don’t let the past determine your future. Champions of faith, like King David, aren’t champions because they didn’t sin, but because they repented and didn’t let their sin define them.

- Understand that your past does not hold back God’s future work in and through you. David and Bathsheba went on to have four sons (1 Chronicles 3:5), including Solomon, of whom it was said, “The Lord loved him” (2 Samuel 12:24). In the years to come, David and Bathsheba’s lineage is a thread that is woven through many biblical men and women of faith and ultimately directly to Jesus Christ.

God is in the restoration business. He is the mender of broken lives, hearts and spirits, and desires all to have a yielded and willing heart towards Him. As we consider those dealing with this very difficult matter, may we strive to mercifully support and comfort others with the same mercy and comfort “the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort” gives to us (2 Corinthians 1:3-7) when we face seemingly insurmountable challenges.
China pushes to displace America as global leader

Commentator Steve Bannon gave this interesting assessment of China’s geopolitical ambitions on his TV program War Room on April 8, 2021:

“...The Chinese . . . are the only power in history that have tried to do all three great theories of geopolitics at the same time. One is Mackinder’s, control the Eurasian landmass [as the ‘world island’] with internal lines of communication.

“The second is the British and . . . the American . . . followed on from Nelson and the Royal Navy, which was, as an island off of there [i.e., off of the main world island], whether the United Kingdom or the island of the Western Hemisphere, you must control the chokepoints. And that’s why you’re at Suez, and that’s why you’re off Djibouti, and that’s why you’re on the Straits of Hormuz, and that’s why you have Singapore. If you notice where the Brits were, whether it’s Hong Kong or it’s Singapore, it’s all near the chokepoints—of the South China Sea, the Straits of Malacca, Hormuz, the Mediterranean at Gibraltar. Every time you look at a chokepoint you’ve got a British colony, got a British naval station there. America, the American Navy, in the Pacific in World War 2 just takes over that . . .

“The third is the Rimland and how to control the rim of the world island and push off any competitor . . . And that’s why the Chinese Communist Party is so focused on pushing the United States out of the South China Sea, pushing it out of Taiwan, back to Guam . . . so you can’t get near the control of this.

“This is the framework, ladies and gentlemen, for the future of the world. The Chinese Communist Party . . . in cahoots with others—the global capital markets of the city of London and in Wall Street, global corporations, the party of Davos— is making a move to become a hegemon to break the superpower, . . . the uni-power, of the United States.”

As noted in the accompanying item below on the recent Suez Canal blockage, Britain and America were given control over many of the world’s land and sea gates through God’s blessings. Sadly, these nations are turning away from God, as brought out in other items on the next page, and are losing these blessings.

Bible prophecy reveals that China will not ultimately dominate the globe as it intends to, though it will be part of a powerful Asian bloc in the end time and may well be used to weaken and even break American power prior to that. The period of American dominance is certainly nearing its end. Greater than China for a time will be a European-centered power bloc, but it will not last long.

Thankfully, all the powers that will yet come forward in a bid for world domination will in the end give way before the truly final power—the returning of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God throughout the earth. Most international forecasters fail to take this supreme geopolitical factor into account.

Suez obstruction: the importance of global chokepoints

In late March 2021, the Ever Given, a massive container ship longer than the Eiffel Tower is tall, was the cause of global commerce disruption when it became stuck in the Suez Canal for nearly a week, blocking other shipping traffic.

Analysts made a number of observations about this event. The New York Times pointed to the danger of the world’s overreliance on global supply chains (Peter Goodman, “In Suez Canal, Stuck Ship Is a Warning About Excessive Globalization,” March 26, 2021). The Suez is a “passage-way for roughly one-tenth of the world’s trade” (ibid.).

Author Matt Stoller of the Open Markets Institute noted the sheer folly of our thinned-out paths of global commerce, made worse by lading onto such massive cargo ships: “The reason this disruption to global commerce seems so dumb is because it is. It starts with the ship size itself . . . [meant to] carry more at a lower cost . . . The rise of mega-ships is paralleled by the consolidation of the shipping industry” (“What Can We Learn From a Big Boat Stuck in a Canal?” (March 28).

Others noted this incident should alert us to how such blockages could be inflicted by enemies on purpose, as pointed out by Scott Savitz at the Rand Corporation (“The Suez Grounding Was an Accident. The Next Blocked Chokepoint Might Not Be,” DefenseOne, March 30). This tactic of “blockships” has a long history, going back to ancient times. Today, it could not only do severe economic damage, but block U.S. and allied naval forces from going to where they are needed in maritime conflicts.

George Friedman of Geopolitical Futures notes that he has “often written about chokepoints—those narrow passageways, on land or at sea, that are essential for the movement of goods and people—in the context of waging war . . . On the whole, maritime checkpoints tend to be more significant than their terrestrial counterparts, especially because of modern economics and warfare, global maritime trade, the dependence of nations on that trade and the increased power of naval forces. In short, chokepoints are central to geopolitical thinking” (“On the Suez Canal and Chokepoints,” March 30).

As we point out in our study guide The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy, these nations have been the recipients of great national blessings promised to the ancient patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants the Israelites. Among these was the possession of the gates of their enemies (Genesis 22:17; 24:60; compare Nahum 3:13). It is no coincidence that Britain and America have possessed and controlled many of the vital land and sea gates in modern history. Be sure to read more about this in the accompanying item above on China’s geopolitical ambitions.
U.S. church membership plunges

A report on a new Gallup poll states that “Americans’ membership in houses of worship continued to decline last year, dropping below 50% for the first time in Gallup’s eight-decade trend. In 2020, 47% of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque, down from 50% in 2018 and 70% in 1999. U.S. church membership was 73% when Gallup first measured it in 1937 and remained near 70% for the next six decades, before beginning a steady decline around the turn of the 21st century” (Jeffrey Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time,” Gallup, March 29, 2021).

This is in large part due to an increasing number who have no religious preference. The report notes: “Over the past two decades, the percentage of Americans who do not identify with any religion has grown from 8% in 1998-2000 to 13% in 2008-2010 and 21% over the past three years.” Another factor is a drop in formal church membership among those who do have a preference.

And all this corresponds to “population change, with those in older generations who were likely to be church members being replaced in the U.S. adult population with people in younger generations who are less likely to belong” to a church (ibid.).

This does not bode well for the future. Currently “66% of traditionalists—U.S. adults born before 1946—belong to a church, compared with 58% of baby boomers, 50% of those in Generation X and 36% of millennials,” with those of Generation Z starting to reach adulthood showing membership rates similar to those for millennials.

“Still, population replacement doesn’t fully explain the decline in church membership, as adults in the older generations have shown roughly double-digit decreases from two decades ago. Church membership is down even more, 15 points, in the past decade among millennials” (ibid.). Evidently all age groups are becoming less religious.

The report further notes that “the U.S. remains a religious nation, with more than seven in 10 affiliating with some type of organized religion. However, far fewer, now less than half, have a formal membership with a specific house of worship. While it is possible that part of the decline seen in 2020 was temporary and related to the coronavirus pandemic, continued decline in future decades seems inevitable, given the much lower levels of religiosity and church membership among younger versus older generations of adults.”

The report concludes: “Churches are only as strong as their membership and are dependent on their members for financial support and service to keep operating . . . . While precise numbers of church closures are elusive, a conservative estimate is that thousands of U.S. churches are closing each year.”

What a sad decline in a nation founded on a belief in and reliance on God. Yet this is not surprising. Through the apostle Paul, God warned in 2 Timothy 3:1-4 that “in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”

Is increasing godlessness a good thing?

A Los Angeles Times op-ed contends that increasing secularization in the United States—with waning religious faith, practice and affiliation—is no cause for concern. Its author, a dean at one of the Claremont Colleges, says, “This increasing godlessness in America is actually a good thing, to be welcomed and embraced” (Phil Zuckerman, “Why America’s Record Godlessness Is Good News for the Nation,” April 2, 2021). The piece argues that lack of religion has only been a problem in abusive dictatorships, maintaining that organic secularization in free and open societies has been liberating for societies.

Of course it then goes on to laud a host of liberal-progressive outcomes and values, such as “women’s reproductive rights [i.e., unrestricted abortion], universal healthcare, gay rights,” among others. It concludes that “the organic secularization we are experiencing in the United States is a progressive force for good, one that is associated with improved human rights, more protections for planet Earth and an increased sociocultural propensity to make this life as fair and just as we can—in the here and now—rather than in a heavenly reward that fewer and fewer of us believe in.”

Such utopian fantasies always lead to more totalitarian outcomes. Sadly, our young people are being taught these false notions in schools more and more. But frankly, this call for a world where man knows best is not at all new. It started in the Garden of Eden, with Satan persuading our first human parents to choose their own way. The truth is that only in seeking God and His ways above all can our needs be sufficiently met (Matthew 6:33). This is true both individually and nationally—and for the whole world.

How can you make sense of the news?

So much is happening in the world, and so quickly. Where are today’s dramatic and dangerous trends taking us? What does Bible prophecy reveal about our future? You’re probably very concerned with the direction the world is heading. So are we. That’s one reason we produce the Beyond Today daily TV commentaries—to help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy. These eye-opening presentations offer you a perspective so badly needed in our confused world—the perspective of God’s Word. Visit us at ucp.org/beyond-today/daily!
Most Christian churches teach that all of humanity is lost—consigned to an eternally burning hellfire—unless they “get saved” by accepting Jesus Christ as personal Savior now!

You’ve probably heard television evangelists tell massive audiences that tomorrow may be too late. Many people become frightened into “making their decision for Christ” following an altar call. This belief implies that when Christ returns, He will be helpless to save anyone not already saved. But is this teaching found in the Bible?

To the contrary, God’s Word presents the concept of “firstfruits,” teaching that God is not trying to save everyone right now but is seeding the world with the first of future harvests. The story of the two trees in Eden continues

Notice what happened after our first parents, Adam and Eve, rejected God and the gift of everlasting life:

“Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’—therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim [angelic beings] at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3:22-24, emphasis added throughout).

The tree of life—representing access to salvation (eternal life)—became off limits to humankind. Since then the world has been barred from access to God and receiving eternal life, except for the comparative few God specially calls in His plan leading to His Kingdom.

God initially worked with an individual person here or a family there. We’re familiar with Noah, Moses, Abraham and David. Now God is using more people brought together in His Church and called for this purpose, yet still very few among the world’s masses. Jesus described His Church not as the giant churches we see today, but a “little flock” (Luke 12:32), relatively speaking. They are referred to in Scripture as the “firstfruits”—an agricultural picture for a small initial harvest like the first ripe stalks of wheat, barley or corn from a field, the first few ripe vegetables from a garden or the first ripe fruits from a tree or vine.

Far from trying to get every human being saved spiritually during mankind’s history, again except for the few He would call, God cut mankind off from salvation when Adam and Eve sinned and were expelled from the garden.

All you have to do is look at today’s headlines to see clearly this is not God’s world right now in terms of its society. Access to the tree of life remains very limited. By contrast we see, in a sense, wide open access to the tree Adam and Eve sinned in eating from, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Ever since they gave in to Satan in partaking of that tree, the world has been governed by him as the “prince of the power of the air,” an evil spiritual influence (Ephesians 2:2).

Jesus said that none can come to Him unless God the Father specially calls them (John 6:44, 65)—and, again, He has called relatively few at this time.

But please note that this does not mean those not called by the Father in this age are lost, as explained in our important Bible study guide God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind. The short version is simply this: At Christ’s return, the Father will call everybody then living, and after a period of 1,000 years He will resurrect to mortal life all the billions of people who had not yet been called, offering them at that time the opportunity for spiritual salvation. Thus all of mankind will be called, but each in his or her own time order.

Here, though, our focus is on the firstfruits.

Firstfruits harvest and seed formation

Jesus referred to His people as “the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13). They currently represent just a sprinkling of truth around the world.

At this very moment God is planting and raising up His firstfruits for reaping as the beginning of much greater harvests in the future.
The Church today is pictured in Scripture as a firstfruits harvest—the sprouting seeds of God’s future Kingdom. Jesus Christ lives as the first of the firstfruits—the first to be ultimately harvested into the Kingdom. As the apostle Paul wrote, “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). He elsewhere stated that “we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, “eagerly awaiting our full transformation into God’s glorified, immortal children (Romans 8:23). So there are a limited number of people who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, with Jesus being the first to be fully transformed into glory.

Jesus Christ, the first of the firstfruits, prepared the earth for the seeding of God’s Kingdom. He was buried in the earth as a seed in death to lead the way for others to follow, giving life to God’s plan (John 12:24). Looking back to the start of the process, in plant reproduction male sperm from pollen must fertilize female ovules to form a seed with an embryo, the development of which is enabled to proceed through implantation in the ground to germinate through absorbing water and nourishment from the soil. Likewise in human reproduction, the male sperm must fertilize the female ovum, forming an embryo that is able to develop through implantation in the womb, nourishing this new life.

This parallels the receiving of spiritual life. A person’s human spirit must be fertilized and nourished with the Spirit and Word of God, thus germinating spiritual understanding and eternal life (compare John 6:63, 68; 1 Corinthians 2:11; 1 Peter 1:23). Again, only a few undergo this process prior to Christ’s second coming.

God is seeding now, not yet saving the world

As pointed out earlier, God is not trying to save the whole world now. Instead, He is laying the groundwork for a much larger harvest in the future, beginning in this age with His firstfruits. Jesus told His disciples that He deliberately hid the truth from the masses: “It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (Matthew 13:11). This is why Christ spoke in parables (verse 13). God’s first spiritual harvest of people is small. Throughout history God’s Church has been small and persecuted.

The Greek word translated “church,” ekklesia, literally means “called-out ones” in the sense of a group called to assemble out of a larger population. God handpicks His servants. Everybody can’t be “called out” or nobody would actually be called out from anybody else!

James 1:18 tells us regarding God the Father, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”

God is not trying to save the whole world now. Rather, He is seeding the world now with His firstfruits—the seeds of His Kingdom. This is pictured in the observance of the biblical Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, when the Israelites presented a special firstfruits offering.

It was on this day of Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus’ resurrection, when the Holy Spirit came and entered into Jesus’ disciples, numbering just 120 at the time. It was the first time a sizeable group was spiritually converted at the same time. This was the beginning of the New Testament Church. Three thousand more were added later the same day.

“And they [the disciples] were all filled with the Holy Spirit . . . Then Peter said to them [the other people listening], ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:4, 38).

Being led by God’s Spirit is living a great miracle

Those who are truly Christians recognize that a great miracle has taken
place in their lives. Being changed and led by God’s Spirit is one of the greatest miracles of all. It is truly a germination process, enabling human beings to understand God’s spiritual plan and be transformed.

The lives of those who received the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 were changed dramatically. The book of Acts is replete with the stories of these people’s lives and the impact they had on the society of that day. The change was so evident they were described as having “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Such was the dramatic, dynamic power of the Holy Spirit!

In Romans 8, Paul says that to be a son of God a person must be led by God’s Spirit (verse 14). He also points out that if a person doesn’t have God’s Spirit dwelling in him or her, then that person does not truly belong to God (verse 9).

It is through God’s Spirit, with Christ living in us, that we actually accomplish what we do as Christians—not through our own efforts. The glory and credit must go to God. (See “What Does the Holy Spirit Do for Us?” below).

However, it isn’t enough to simply have and be led on occasion by God’s Spirit. The Holy Spirit must be allowed to become the energizing force in our lives to produce the qualities of true Christianity.

We must ask ourselves if we are truly being led by God’s Spirit in all we do and think, allowing it to serve as the guiding force in our lives. Only through persisting in this process will we be ultimately saved as the firstfruits in God’s plan of salvation.

**Experiencing the greatest miracle today**

Being called by the Father, being baptized and receiving His Holy Spirit provide an outlook on life that is quite rare in our world today. Through the Holy Spirit we begin to look at life differently. Just as we must recognize the great power of God to have performed miracles in the days of the ancient Israelites, so we must not forget the power of God to work miracles in our lives today.

Whenever a person is granted God’s Holy Spirit, he or she becomes a walking miracle.

Those drawn by the Father to follow Christ today are granted, on repentance and baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Joining with our human Spirit, it is the impregnation of God life, making us His children, heirs of God (Romans 8:16-17).

The truth of salvation is that God is seeding the world today with His followers—His firstfruits. And those followers must have spiritual life conceived and germinated in their minds through the Spirit and Word of God. They will later help in the much greater harvest of fruit for God’s Kingdom yet to come.

**What Does the Holy Spirit Do for Us?**

To grasp how God’s Spirit works in our lives, we must understand what God’s Spirit is. In Scripture, the Holy Spirit is described as the power and essence of God at work in our lives. This divine power enables us to follow Him, being “led by the Spirit of God” (Romans 8:14).

By the Spirit dwelling within us we are the children of God. What does God’s Holy Spirit do for us as Christians?

- **God’s Spirit doesn’t drive, drag or push us around; it leads us.** It will not prevent us from sinning, nor will it force us to do what’s right. It leads us, and we must be willing to follow.
- **The Holy Spirit keeps us in contact with God’s mind.** God’s Spirit works with our mind.
- **Through the Holy Spirit, we can be influenced by God for the good.** This is in contrast to the evil influence from the world around us and our own corrupt human nature.
- **The Holy Spirit provides a deeper understanding of God’s Word and His will for humanity.** (1 Corinthians 2:9-11). Without that Spirit, a person cannot understand God’s divinely expressed Word and will, “for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (verse 14).
  - **The Holy Spirit makes overcoming sin possible.** There is nothing too difficult for us with the power of God working in our lives.
  - **God’s Spirit helps us in our weaknesses.** The apostle Paul, speaking for all of us, said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).
  - **The Holy Spirit convicts our conscience and helps us see sin as it really is.** Jesus Christ said it would “convict the world of sin” (John 16:8). God’s Spirit within us, working with our conscience, helps us to recognize and avoid sin. “It will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (same verse).
  - **The Holy Spirit produces godly fruit in our lives.** Just as an apple tree produces apples, God’s Spirit produces a particular type of fruit in the life of a Christian—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).
  - **The Holy Spirit comforts and encourages us.** Jesus Christ promised to send His followers “another Comforter” (John 14:16-17, King James Version). True comfort and reassurance come from the Spirit of God dwelling in us. We need not be unduly worried about the future or what may happen to us. God’s Spirit gives us the assurance that whatever happens will ultimately work out for the good “to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

(This is adapted from our study guide Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion. Download or request your free copy at ucg.org/booklets.)
Where Have All the Fathers Gone?

A devastating epidemic is leaving a trail of broken hearts and broken dreams in its wake. What is this tragic outbreak? It’s the epidemic of disappearing fathers, who are sorely needed.

by Mario Seiglie

As soon as they heard the door open, the two young girls jumped up and began yelling, “Daddy’s home, Daddy’s home!” No longer quietly sitting with Mommy, their heartbeats were now racing and their eyes widened, anticipating playtime with their father. Soon he was tossing them up and down, and they squealed with laughter when he acted like a big bear. Their mother sat by, watching with delight and amusement, ready to calm things down should the horsing around get too rough.

Who would’ve thought such a scene could be in danger of disappearing?

Disappearance of the intact family

Sadly, it’s come to the point in many countries that fewer children than ever will have the opportunity to grow up in a home with both a father and a mother. Statistics have shown that only a third of the children in the United States will reach age 18 with both biological parents living at home.

“Fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation,” warns social historian David Blankenhorn. “It is the leading cause of declining child well-being in this society. It is also the engine driving our most urgent social problems, from crime to adolescent pregnancy to child sex abuse to domestic violence against women” (Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem, 1995, p. 1).

With U.S. divorce rates hovering just below 50 percent and the resultant single-parent households alarmingly on the rise, it’s no wonder that only a minority of kids can count on living with both Mom and Dad. Usually, it’s the father who doesn’t stick around and leaves the mom to rear the kids by herself—which is a distinct disadvantage for the children. (See “What Happened to Fathers?” on page 24.)

How important is the role of the father in child rearing? Studies have shown that dads, who normally are not given as much credit as moms in child rearing, actually play a vital role in the upbringing of children and their future success. Amazingly, this research reinforces the same principles written in the Bible thousands of years ago! Let’s look at some of the evidence.

“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

The Bible describes the ideal father as actively and tenderly engaged in his children’s rearing and education.
Yes, his masculine child-rearing tactics often include horseplay with the kids that can annoy and cause anxiety in Mom, the maintainer of domestic peace and order. Yet his rowdiness actually fulfills a vital role in the children's social, physical and intellectual skills in school and beyond. “Children's social, physical, and intellectual development benefit greatly from the involvement of fathers,” observes Yale child psychiatrist Kyle Pruett (quoted by Judsen Culbreth, “What Dads Are Made Of,” Reader's Digest, June 2005, p. 72A). The intellectual gains are noticeable from the first year of life and continue on past high school.

“By eight weeks,” Dr. Pruett explains, “infants can anticipate differences in maternal and paternal handling styles . . . When infants were approached by their mother, they slowed and regulated their heart and respiratory rates, relaxed their shoulders, and lowered their eyelids (Ahh . . . Mom). When the father approached, the infant’s heart and respiratory rates quickened, shoulders hunched up, and eyes widened and brightened (Dad’s here . . . party time!” (Fatherneed: Why Father Care Is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child, 2000, p. 25).

A father’s playfulness helps his children develop motor skills, hand-eye coordination, balance and confidence. I remember teaching my four daughters at an early age to ride a bike, snow ski, roller skate, snorkel and enjoy many other types of sports. Their favorite time as children was when we invented games like the helicopter ride, with me whirling them with my feet like the blades of a helicopter, and the volcano, where they would fall from my knees into the bed. Such activities created a lasting bond between us and helped them lose their fears about taking on new challenges.

Child studies show that this kind of rough-and-tumble play helps children develop social and emotional experiences that prepare them for school. Researchers further found that “both sons and daughters of the dad-involved group [in the study] had higher levels of verbal skills,” with the boys’ IQ being “positively associated with their father’s nurturing, and, interestingly, negatively associated with their father’s disciplinary restrictiveness. Boys with nurturing fathers scored higher than the boys whose fathers were less involved unless the father was a strict, authoritarian disciplinarian” (pp. 43-44).

So, although discipline has its place, when it becomes harsh and overbearing, as the Bible warns against, it yields negative results.

“My son, pay attention to my wisdom; lend your ear to my understanding” (Proverbs 5:1).

Mothers normally give care and comfort, while fathers focus more on teaching children about the world around them. Notice, for example, that when mothers pick up a baby, they usually have the infant face her—whereas fathers often pick up children so they can look outward, and explore what is in front of them. Dads are “wired” to play a very important role in separating children from remaining absorbed in their mother’s world.

“It is in the toddler years, from 1½ to about 3½,” says Dr. Pruett, “that fathers play one of the most critical roles they ever play in the life of their child: helping the child safely and securely separate from the intense maternal dependency of infancy. “Healthy though dependency on their mother is for children at the beginning of their life, they will not experience, let alone practice, their own competence and mastery skills if they do not strike off in search of their own physical and emotional autonomy. And in this world, you, the father, are the expert guide” (pp. 83-84).
Actively involved dads, who let their children explore the outside world and teach them about the marvels of nature, will help them develop curiosity and self-esteem. “Infants who have been well fathered during the first eighteen to twenty-four months of life are more secure than those who were not in exploring the world around them, and they do so with vigor and interest. They tend to be more curious and less hesitant or fearful, especially in the face of novel or unusual stimuli” (p. 41).

Eventually these exploratory skills will become crucial in school and the workplace. People who are inquisitive, socially developed and not afraid to try different methods will have an easier time excelling as challenges arise. After all, Dad already taught them how to deal in the real world, how to overcome frustrations and figure things out for themselves.

“Fathers can affect how well their children progress in school, which subjects they prefer and even the kinds of occupations they choose,” says Dr. Parke. “Whether a child prefers reading and hates math or aspires to be a physicist or an engineer rather than a book critic or a historian is affected by the father’s attitudes, encouragement and other behavior” (Fatherhood, 1996, p. 156).

Studies done in the 1960s about the effect fathers had on their children surprised even the researchers. For example, they found the amount of time fathers spend reading with their children is a strong predictor for many intellectual abilities—in particular, of the daughters’ verbal skills. Remarkably, the same study did not find mothers reading to children to have similar effects, indicating there was something unique in the father’s role of reading to them.

For example, women who were high achievers, such as Margaret Thatcher...
and Indira Gandhi, former prime ministers of Britain and India respectively, mentioned that they were highly influenced and encouraged by their fathers in their academic and political careers.

Another important role in which the father excels is teaching children about spiritual and moral values. When the father is a good role model of morality, children respect both of their parents more. If the father establishes rules that are fair and a level playing field in which the children can flourish, they tend to be more obedient. But when the mother sets the rules, children tend to defy them more.

“Sons of fathers who took more responsibility for limit setting, discipline, and helping their child with personal problems and schoolwork,” adds Dr. Pruet, “had significantly higher empathy scores [—better understanding and caring about how others feel] . . . Father deprivation is directly linked to difficulties in a child’s self-control” (pp. 48, 51).

“But did He not make them [husbands and wives] one . . . ? And why one? He seeks godly offspring” (Malachi 2:15).

When God united Adam and Eve, the first two human beings, in marriage, He told them to multiply and fill the earth. God had carefully designed the family unit so children would be reared between two parents who would act as opposite poles (masculine and feminine).

The child would be in the middle of this union, receiving equal influence from both parents. An analogy would be that of a metal ball suspended between two magnetic poles. Similarly, each parent exerts his or her unique influence so the child is reared to have a balanced and full personality.

Researchers have confirmed that actively involved male and female parents are ideal for bringing up balanced and mature children. Here are some of the findings:

• Children yearn deeply for dads and are born with a drive to find and connect with their fathers and not only with their mothers.
• Fathers have the internal capacity or instinct to respond to their child’s desire to connect.
• Men and women do not differ in the depth of love toward their children.
• Each child is loved in a unique way by the father and the mother.
• The desire to feel emotionally connected to their children throughout life is the same for men and women, though this may find differing forms of expression.
• Fathers and mothers are equally able to interpret their child’s behavioral cues.
• Fathers and mothers are equally anxious about leaving the child in the care of someone else.
• With the exception of lactation, there is no evidence women are biologically predisposed to be better parents than men.
• Men who become active fathers gain in their ability to understand themselves and others.
• A father who is deeply involved with his children experiences beneficial health results.
• A father present at childbirth is the single most important factor protecting against birth complications and further illness or trauma in the newborn.

Whatever Happened to Fathers?

Today it’s common to see the father’s role disparaged in media, many times making him out to be a bumbling, inept fool while the children are saved by an almost superhuman mother.

This is a subtle but withering attack on the proper role of the father. The effect of filling our children’s heads with negative images of fathers, of ignoring men who share equally in raising their children,” says Dr. Ross Parke, “and of showing nothing but part-time or no-time father is, quite simply, devastating” (Throwaway Dads, 1999, p. 81).

Modern literature thrives on this caricature of the father figure. Books such as Raising Boys Without Men exemplify this radical vision of children not needing fathers.

Yet when we see the statistics on how hedonistic and dysfunctional society is becoming by following such ideas, we ask, Where have all the fathers gone? Where is their leadership? The answer? Many have selfishly deserted their responsibilities. But others have been cowed by today’s liberal, morally relativistic culture and have slowly relinquished their God-given roles as providers, protectors, teachers and nurturers.

A particularly unsettling passage from the book of Isaiah describes society not only as it was in Isaiah’s day, but prophetically as it would be at the time before Christ’s return. It is eerily similar to what we see today: “I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. The people will be oppressed, every one by another and every one by his neighbor; the child will be insolent toward the elder and the base toward the honorable . . . The look on their countenance witnesses against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves . . . As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them” (Isaiah 3:4-5, 9, 12).

Yes, it was prophesied that the father’s role would one day be mostly forfeited in the face of an increasingly blind and lawless society. “Much of our national discussion of youth crime,” writes sociologist David Blankenhorn, “simply ignores the elephant in the room called fatherlessness. Moreover, many analysts come quite close to viewing all traditional norms of fatherhood not as a remedy for the problem of youth violence but rather as a leading cause of it” (Fatherless America, 1995, p. 29).

In the face of all this, we have a duty to resist following society’s evil ways. One crucial way is by strengthening the family unit as best we can. We must realize the importance that both the father and the mother have in properly rearing children and not give in to the false notions commonly presented of alternative-lifestyle parenting being just as good.
How can the hearts of fathers be turned to their children? An important way is taking an active role in their children’s lives!

- Overindulging a child usually results in selfishness. One encouraging trend in Western society is the number of parents who now want to coparent, or share in the physical and emotional care of their children as well as in parental responsibilities and decision-making. Instead of leaving it to Mom to basically rear the children, more fathers now want to become actively involved.

“Men from Wall Street to homeless shelters,” says Dr. Pruett, “speak with conviction about wanting to father their children more actively than they themselves were fathered. As a senior manager at the investment house Goldman Sachs puts it, ‘I don’t want my son to feel the same void in his heart where his father belongs that I do in mine’” (p. 1).

“And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:6).

God is very concerned with preserving families. It’s interesting that the hearts of the fathers must first be turned to the children before the children’s hearts are then turned toward their fathers.

How can the hearts of fathers be turned to their children? An important way is by fathers taking an active role in their children’s lives!

Simply reading to them has been shown to make a big difference in improving children’s verbal skills. Playing with them, so that they feel the warmth, tenderness and masculine good humor of a father, goes a long way to establishing those bonds of closeness that have been shown to determine such positive outcomes in the future.

Teaching children out for a walk and pointing out all the wondrous living things around them will arouse their curiosity and kindle their thirst for knowledge. Showing them how to overcome their fears by tackling physical challenges, such as how to ride a bike or take up a sport, helps create confidence, sociability, physical coordination and perseverance that are so valuable in school and the workplace.

Fathers are also ideally suited to help instill logic skills in their children so they can understand not only what they should do in a given situation, but why they should do it. The Bible is a marvelous source in this regard, for not only does it reveal true moral and spiritual principles, but it also explains from God’s point of view why these should be followed and what happens when they are and when they aren’t.

On the other side, how can children’s hearts be turned toward their fathers? Again, the best source to begin searching for the answer is the Bible, which says this turning of the heart begins with parents following God’s example in His love for His children and by children honoring, obeying and loving their parents.

After all, the Fifth Commandment instructs, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land” (Exodus 20:12). According to God, both parents should be involved in child rearing, and the children should show equal respect for both of them.

As research has confirmed, there’s nothing better than God’s original design of a loving father and mother, along with an extended family, rearing their children in His ways. Dr. Parke states it succinctly when he says that mothers and fathers are indeed different, “but their distinctive styles of caretaking complement each other perfectly to the advantage of children” (quoted by Culbreth, p. 72D).

It’s such a tragedy that society has come to the point of asking where all the fathers have gone—with so many leaving or abandoning their proper roles. If you are a father or will be at some point, you don’t have to follow the trend. Instead, by following God’s laws and true values, you can be the kind of father He wants you to be! And your children will be blessed.

LEARN MORE
Much of society has lost sight of what it means to have a happy and productive marriage and family. Does the Bible, God’s Word, offer us guidance? Yes, it certainly does! Download or request our free study guide Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension.

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While Jesus and His apostles sat atop the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem shortly before His death, they asked Him about the events that would herald His future coming in power to reign (Matthew 24:3). His response, known as the Olivet prophecy or discourse, begins in Matthew 24 with a marked increase in troubles leading to world catastrophe. He continues with a number of lessons about facing that time, concluding in Matthew 25 with three parables about the outcome of our spiritual condition in the day we stand before Him.

We’ll here look at the first of these—the parable of the ten virgins.

Ten betrothed virgins

A key theme of this parable continues from the end of Matthew 24, where Jesus says, “The master of that servant will come on a day . . . and at an hour that he is not aware of” (verse 50). It’s a sudden return, with even these followers of Christ caught by surprise.

Transitioning to the parable, He begins, “Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom” (Matthew 25:1). The subject here is a wedding. In that ancient culture the parents were involved in the matching of a bride and groom, and the groom was expected to pay a special bride price to the bride’s parents for the right to marry. The engagement period could be lengthy. Once an agreement was settled the groom would then prepare a place to share with his bride. Often a new room was added onto his parents’ home. When it was finished and declared ready, he would go and fetch the bride, typically at night with close friends. Through the streets of the village would go the shout, “The bridegroom is coming!” Then commenced a wedding ceremony and celebration lasting several days.

In other passages it’s clearly established that Jesus is the Bridegroom, that God the Father has prepared a wedding and that God’s Church, made up of Christ’s true followers, is Jesus’ Bride—now “betrothed . . . as a chaste virgin to Christ,” spiritually speaking (2 Corinthians 11:2; see Ephesians 5:22-32). The 10 virgins of the parable thus represent those in the Church, portrayed as spiritually pure, going out to meet the returning Christ to join Him in glory.

Lamps and oil supply

Each of these virgins carries a light to make their way in the dark, the Greek word lampas used here meaning either a clay oil lamp or a torch. To keep the light burning for either one, it was essential to carry enough oil for an extended period. Spiritually we need the light of God to lead us, shining out to us and through us. And the olive oil that fuels the light parallels the supply of the Holy Spirit, itself compared to anointing oil (compare Philippians 1:19; Acts 10:38).

Matthew 25 continues: “Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps” (verses 2-3).

The 10 virgins here represent the entire Church. They go out to meet the Bridegroom, Christ. By receiving the Spirit they have the life of Christ in them (Galatians 2:20), and they live a life of preparing.

All had God’s Spirit. The five who were said to be wise took vessels of extra oil. The other five, the foolish, did not. The difference in preparation would yield a difference in spiritual growth and power. The wise kept access to the Holy Spirit flowing, using it to take on the divine nature and grow in grace and knowledge.

All woken from sleep

Continuing: “But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept” (verse 5).

An engagement period could be stretched out. The delay in this case is the time between Christ’s first and second comings. The seeming delay can lead to loss of urgency. Peter warned that scoffers would ask, “Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Peter 3:4). It’s a sign of the last days that even those who watch and wait for His return will grow weary, let down and fall asleep.

Christ said that “they all slumbered and slept”—the whole Church. Of course in our mortal weakness we can only go so long without falling asleep (compare Matthew 26:40-41). Physically we need sleep. The real problem here is a matter of preparation—of not remaining alert by
exercising and using God's Spirit.

Next: “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’” (Matthew 25:6).

The voice of the bridegroom was heard in the streets. The time for the marriage was at hand! The whole town would be aroused to join in the festivities.

The announcement of Christ's return comes amid the great spiritual darkness of the end time, with the world in the grip of spiritual deception and drunkenness. Yet those with God's Spirit have the help needed to see through the deception and resist the way of the world.

The announcement of Christ's coming stirs people awake. Then what?

**Personal responsibility to prepare**

“Then all those virgins got up and put their own lamps in order” (verse 7, Amplified Bible). The preparation allows for more light from the lamp or torch. Here it means the Church is awake and anticipating the coming of Christ and the marriage to the Lamb (see Revelation 19:7). When the call of Christ comes, we must wake up and be ready to go to Him and be wed.

But something is wrong with five of the virgins. Those called foolish see their light going out. They need oil but have no more to refill their supply. “And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out’” (verse 8). Yet it doesn't work that way in spiritual terms.

“But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves’” (verse 9). Salvation is a personal matter. You cannot borrow a relationship with God. Christians are told, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). The power of the Spirit must be at work in each disciple individually.

To keep our spiritual “oil” full, we must be regularly renewed with God's help through the means He directs us in—especially prayer, Bible study, meditation, fasting, fellowship and ongoing repentance with obedience. (Read our free study guide *Tools for Spiritual Growth* to learn more.)

The coming of Jesus Christ will not only stun the world, but even those looking for and anticipating His arrival need to wake up. Will the cares of the world lull some to sleep?

**A warning to not put it off**

Whatever it may be, this parable shows that many will awake and find they are not fully prepared to go with Christ to the wedding. “And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut” (verse 10).

Frantically the foolish virgins return and seek entry into the supper. “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (verses 11-13).

There's an ominous tone of finality to these verses. Is all lost without hope? Is there room for repentance? At some point it will be too late. But another way to understand this parable is to recognize that the preaching of the gospel even today is effectively part of the shout that the Bridegroom is coming. So there is still time to do what is needed to stay spiritually filled.

For those Christians who are neglectful, Christ will knock at the door of their hearts to be let in, as in the message to the “lukewarm” church at Laodicea in Revelation 3. He tells them to “buy” from Him “gold refined in the fire”—godly character obtained amid trials—urging repentance (verses 16, 19; 1 Peter 1:7).

But as the parable teaches, a time will come when no further opportunity remains. And who knows how long your own life will last? So don't put it off.

The parable also gives us the key to enduring to the end of the age and entering into the marriage supper at Christ's return. That key is the help of the Holy Spirit. Seek to keep it full in your life. In the darkness of the end time, those with enough oil will have the light to guide them and keep them empowered. Make sure you're in that group!  

For those Christians who are neglectful, Christ will knock at the door of their hearts to be let in.
We all have key moments in life that grabbed our attention and left a lasting impact on us. Some are shared by many. I remember the moments I heard about President Kennedy's assassination, the space shuttle Challenger explosion and the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001. Those events still seem like yesterday.

Other bookmark memories are more personal, and I'd like to share one of these. I remember the where, the when, and most importantly the why in this case that led me to a fuller understanding of what to bring and what to leave behind on the spiritual journey initiated by Jesus' invitation of "Follow Me."

I was invited to an ailing church member's residence. I knew him fairly well, but I was about to gain deeper insight into how he walked through life. Entering his bedroom, I saw above his door a large sticker declaring, "Worry is a responsibility that God hasn't give me." Cute, you might be thinking—nice thought for the day. But allow me to share more details.

Meeting with a man of true vision

This man was blind since early childhood. Every day he woke up walking through a different world than mine. Every day he could face the challenge of bumping into a wall, falling down a staircase, reaching for something unreachable only to come up empty, being knocked over by someone on a sidewalk, falling from a curb, or being hit in a pedestrian crosswalk by a distracted driver. If anyone had reason to worry every waking moment of life, he could've made that claim! But he didn't.

I often saw him walking in town with his red and white cane ever tapping on the pavement before him and swishing back and forth like a minesweeper to reveal any impediment. But as I looked above his doorway, suddenly 1+1=2 came together.

I now knew why the man did not live in a box of his own making lined with worries and fears. I came to realize what made his spiritual heart tick. The sticker's message that worrying assumes responsibility God hasn't give me was not merely stuck above his doorway as a witness to others, but was sealed in his heart as a life-giving instrument to move through life's many chapters. My blind friend "saw" something that hasn't yet come into view for many others—that worry is not heaven-sent but earthbound and homegrown.

Seeing through fearless eyes of faith

So now I have a question for you: What are you worried about? What is living rent-free in your mind and sinking your heart? Worry is a thin stream of destructive fear trickling through the mind. If indulged, it cuts a channel by which all other thoughts are drained.

How harmful is worry left unabated? As old expressions attest, not only can worry leave us "tied up in knots," but we can "worry ourselves to death"—at least a "living death" by self-induced paralysis if not actually dying from stress. The bottom line is that cowering fear (worry on steroids!) cuts us off from God and will destroy us. The opposite of that—trusting faith—draws us near to God, bringing great blessing.

Helen Keller, noted blind lecturer, was known to say, "There are none so blind as those who will not see." My sightless friend's physical vision may have been hindered, but the eyes of his heart were wide open and "seeing" where God was leading Him.

The light of God penetrates all those who earnestly seek after Him. And in truly accepting Jesus' invitation of "Follow Me" a miraculous internal vision is formed beyond physical senses: "'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" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Worshipping God or worry?

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ confronted the issue of worry and left an extraordinary map and travel kit to help us navigate our lives and determine what to bring along and what to discard on our journey with Him.

His original audience went about on foot, moving less than five miles per hour, so they could take in a lot—very
different from our fast-paced, 24/7 society. Still, they, too, had to be reminded to open their eyes and resist living in a darkened world of doubt and fear. As we read in Matthew 6, Jesus told them not to worship their worries—as having our minds centered on these amounts to—but to worship God. They could have only one Master!

“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money [or to anything else, including worry and ungodly fear]. That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing?” (New Living Translation, verses 24-25).

“Look at the birds,” He went on to say. “They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?” (verses 26-27, NLT). Have you ever seen sparrows hyperventilating over worry? Imagine them frantically chirping Why? When? or How?!

Continuing: “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need” (verses 28-33, NLT).

Dump the worrying

Seeking the Kingdom of God is not merely about a destination. It’s about a way of traveling—living righteously. As His children, God does expect us to plan with legitimate concerns in mind, but not to make plans to worry!

Consider that when we worry, God’s wisdom is made small and irrelevant. It’s as if we think He has a purpose without a plan and is unable to bring about what’s best for those who belong to Him. Further, God’s love is doubted. Worry implies that He cares little for those who have given their all to Him. It screams out that His grace is not sufficient. When we worry, God’s power is placed in lockdown.

It’s time to dump the worrying and throw out our wayward fears. That alone can seem scary. Sometimes we become so secure in our insecurities because we have lived with them so long. We have talked to them, nurtured them, put them to bed each night only to greet them in the morning. Dump them now and, amid your needful circumstances, earnestly ask in believing faith that our Heavenly Father would fill you with His love, power and wisdom!

In closing allow me to share more about the gentleman I had gone to see. He had called me to his apartment to let me know he had been diagnosed with cancer. He asked to be anointed (per James 5:14-15) and set apart for God’s perfect will to be made manifest.

My final visit with him was when I walked through another door in a hospital. There was no sign above that door other than a room number. His earthly days were numbered, but I shared with him what I learned from my previous visit that was now embedded in my mind and heart.

In this moment when a blind man in a dire situation had every human reason to be worried, I was able to share confidence in the great truth above that other doorway of remembrance—that worry was not a responsibility God had given to me or him. He smiled as he always smiled, knowing it to be true. I was happy I knew it too. Both of us were blessed. And that same blessing is there for you also.

What are you worried about? What is living rent-free in your mind and sinking your heart? Cowering fear cuts us off from God.

Illustration by Shaun Venish

It seems we all have plenty to worry about. But what does worrying solve? Nothing! Instead, God wants us to learn to live by faith. But how do we do that? Request or download our free study guide You Can Have Living Faith today!

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“When God Became Man So Man Could Become God”
This is very new information to me. I’m trying to get my head around it. At the moment, it is just a little too much to digest.

Very interesting read, thank you much.

I was taken aback when I read your title, “When God Became Man So Man Could Become God.” It was utterly shocking to me because you used the title “God” with a capital “G.” I am considering canceling my subscription to Beyond Today because of this very misleading idea that man could ever become God. Please know that I have enjoyed your magazine up to this point.

We received many letters about this article. Our study guide Why Were You Born? delves deeper into the scriptures that reveal the destiny of the human race in God’s family. You can find it online at ucg.org/booklets where you can request a free print copy. Or contact the office nearest you listed on page 31.

“Jesus’ Sacrifice and the Need for New Government”
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More letters about Beyond Today magazine
Your articles have really opened my understanding to the Scriptures. Keep up the good work.

I received my Beyond Today magazine today. I really appreciated the whole issue, which I have already read. I may be visiting the website and following up on some of the information that you presented. Thank you and may our gracious Lord continue to bless all you do.

We received a message about renewing our subscription to your magazine En azve Becnu (Russian edition of Beyond Today). Thank you very much. We would like to continue to receive the magazine, which we read with pleasure and share in our Christian congregation in a correc-
tional colony. The administration of the colony has allocated us a small office for the peaceful conduct of our meetings and for serving our Lord on the Sabbath and Sunday. We gather in a group of 15-20 people who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. We study Scripture together, pray and fellowship.

Letters about Beyond Today television
I used to watch Beyond Today TV every Sunday morning on Newsmax TV, but now your program is no longer offered there. Can you please advise where I might be able to still see those very informative and interesting discussions? Thanks and God bless you for putting this information out.

We’re glad you enjoy our program. Besides being freely available to watch online at BeyondToday.TV, YouTube and on our Roku, FireTV, Chromecast and other Smart TV apps (just search “Beyond Today” on the app store of those platforms to find it), we also air in various TV markets around the country. Find the most current listing at ucg.org/beyond-today/station-listing, or on page 31 of this issue.

How many people are you planning on sending to hell with your proclamation that Jesus Christ is going to send everyone to heaven as proclaimed in your advertisement for Beyond Today on Newsmax TV? Sure, make everyone comfortable that they are going to heaven eventually no matter what they do! May God curse your religion! Your teaching is perverse and very dangerous! It is definitely heresy!

While we appreciate the expressed concern, we do not know what you are referring to since none of our Newsmax TV ads, TV programs, publications or media efforts teach that everyone is going to heaven. In fact, quite to the contrary, we teach that no one is going to heaven! Instead, Jesus Christ is returning to earth to establish God’s Kingdom here.

Moreover, not everyone will ultimately repent. Some will reject God and be burned up in the final lake of fire. You may wish to study our detailed publications so that you can more accurately understand what we teach. For a start, look up our Bible study guide What Happens After Death? at ucg.org/booklets. Another one on this topic is Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach? All the best in your studies to discern what the Bible teaches.

Search Facebook for Beyond Today magazine

Are you on Facebook? If so, visit our Beyond Today magazine page. See what other readers are saying. Find links to interesting articles and Web commentaries. Become a Beyond Today magazine Facebook fan!

I really enjoy Beyond Today magazine. It gives a good understanding of the Bible and highlights information not given in mainstream Christian faiths. I highly recommend this magazine to all.

—K.T., Facebook fan

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Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to Beyond Today, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A., or email BTinfo@ucg.org (please include your full name, city, state or province, and country).
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UNITED STATES
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Alabama
Huntsville/Decatur/Florence ch. 15, Sun 6 a.m.
Mobile ch. 35, Sun 7 a.m.

Arkansas
Fort Smith/Fayetteville/Rogers/Springdale ch. 24, Sun 9:30 a.m.

California
San Diego ch. 18, 19, 23, Mon 5 p.m.
San Francisco ch. 29, Sun 6:30 p.m.

D.C.
Washington ch. 50, Sun 9 a.m.

Florida
Tallahassee/Thomasville ch. 40, Sun 10 a.m.
Panama City ch. 18, Sun 7:30 a.m.
Pensacola/FT. Walton ch. 35, Sun 7 a.m.

Illinois
Springfield/Decatur/Champaign ch. 23, Sun 8:30 a.m.

Maryland
Hagerstown ch. 50, Sun 9 a.m.

Ohio
 Toledo ch. 69, Sun 5 p.m.

Oregon
Gresham/Portland ch. 22/23, Sun 7:30 p.m.
Milwaukee ch. 23, Sun 6 a.m.; Mon 11:30 a.m., Wed 4:30 p.m.; Thur 7 a.m.; Fri 5:30 a.m.; Sat 8:30 a.m. & 4:30 p.m.
Oregon City ch. 23, Sun 2:30 p.m.; Thur 10:30 a.m. & 2:30 p.m.; Fri 4:30 a.m.; Sat 3 a.m. & 4 p.m.

Texas
Dallas/Ft. Worth ch. 21, Sun 6:30 a.m.
Houston ch. 57, Sun 10:30 a.m.

Washington
Everett ch. 77, Wed 5 p.m.

INTERNATIONAL AREAS

AUSTRALIA
9GEM Sun 7:30 a.m. nationwide

CANADA
NATIONWIDE CABLE TV
Vision TV Sun 6 p.m. ET
Hope TV Sun 1 p.m. ET

NEW ZEALAND
Prime Television (simulcast on Sky satellite platform) Sun 8:30 a.m.

SOUTH AFRICA
Cape Town DSTV Sun 8:30 a.m.; ch. 263 and open ch. 32, 67
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