

Hong Kong

READ WHAT?

Friendship Manual

April—June 2009

verticalthought[®]

a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's leaders

A large target with a dart hitting the bullseye. The target has concentric rings of white, black, blue, red, and yellow. A dart with a blue and yellow fletching is embedded in the center yellow bullseye.

The Ultimate Goal

**Some Young Adults
Are Leaving Church**

**Answers From
Genesis Part 4**

**Make the Most
of Your Dough**

**The Three-Letter
Word No One Wants
to Talk About**

Sleep: A Key to Weight Control

How Do You Measure Success?

Everyone wants to be a success. As young people, we dream of having all the good things in life—a great job in a career we enjoy, friends, a happy marriage, vacations, opportunities to travel, plenty of leisure time and perhaps even a pet or two. For many, this is success.

But according to studies, many people these days aren't happy. A common assumption is that happiness is based on prosperity. So with the current economic problems affecting people everywhere, we shouldn't be all that surprised that many people aren't happy. Right?

When asked how much more money they'd need to be happy, people, on average, answered 20 percent. But as STLToday.com explained: "It turns out that's not true. If you measure people's income and self-reported happiness over time, you find that while incomes may rise, the general level of happiness does not. That's called the Easterlin Paradox, named after economist Richard A. Easterlin" ("Cold Cash v. Warm Puppy," July 14, 2008).

So what really makes people happy?

Arthur Brooks, in his 2008 book *Gross National Happiness: Why Happiness Matters for America—and How We Can Get More of It*, writes that marriage makes people happy but most couples' happiness levels fall after having children. Having more money doesn't make people happy but giving money away to a charity does. He also says that it is work, not leisure, that makes Americans happy.

One of the most intriguing of Brooks' contentions is that religious people are happier than the nonreligious. Yet critics counter that religion in America simply gives people more social opportunities, a cause to which they can give money and an explanation for the meaning and purpose of life—all things already known to promote happiness. Critics further argue that highly secularized countries,

such as those in Europe, are equally happy without religion. So who's right?

When trying to sort out conflicting opinions, there is only one sure source that has always proven to have accurate, up-to-date advice. This source is the Word of God found in the Holy Bible. (Don't take my word for it—prove it for yourself. Our free booklet *Is the Bible True?* can help.)

Solomon, the wisest and richest king of his time (1 Kings 10:23), concluded that "true happiness lies in eating and drinking and enjoying whatever has been achieved under the sun, throughout the life given by God: for this is the lot of humanity" (Ecclesiastes 5:17-18, New Jerusalem Bible).

"Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding."

Yet we must recognize and appreciate life's blessings as "given by God" in the context of following God for them to truly satisfy. Psalm 146:5 states, "Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God." Proverbs 3:13 further notes, "Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding." Of course we must then apply this. As Proverbs 29:18 says, "Happy is he who keeps the law." So real success involves a life well-lived.

This issue is dedicated to helping you learn godly wisdom and understand true success. Our wish is that each of you will have an abundantly happy life based on this sure knowledge.

VerticalThought

Vertical Thought is a biblically based magazine of understanding for young people aged 12-22. Our name, *Vertical Thought*, is derived from Colossians 3:1-2, which tells us to think about godly things "which are above, where Christ is." *Vertical Thought* is published quarterly by the United Church of God, an International Association, 555 Technecenter Drive, Milford, OH 45150. © 2009 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited.

Publisher: United Church of God, an International Association

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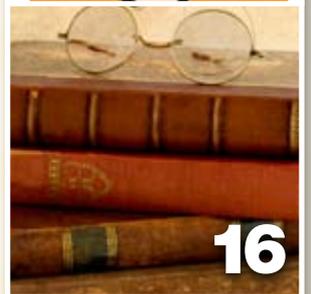
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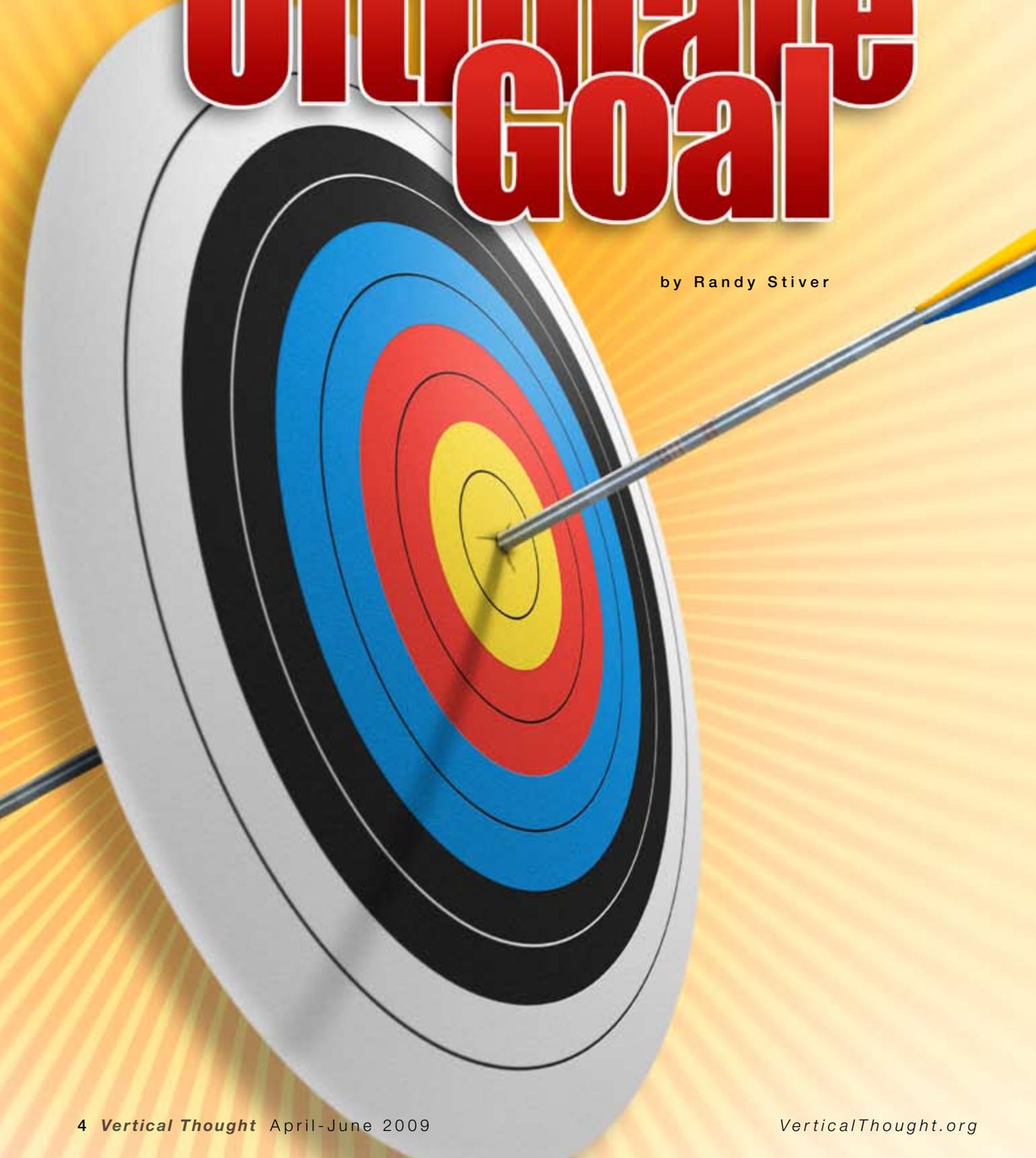
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The Ultimate Goal

by Randy Stiver





Driving home from Winter Camp the other day, two teen campers and I were listening to tunes on an oldies pop-rock station when we heard that line:

“We know what we want, but we don’t know why ...”

It’s a commentary on our modern world—people don’t know the “why” of life. And sadly, that means they don’t know the ultimate goal! How well do you plan? What personal goals have you set? Failing to plan equals planning to fail. Good practical goals give you something to work toward in school, work and life.



Goals have built-in power because they’re promises we make to ourselves to be and do better!

Goals give a sense of purpose and value to your efforts. Setting the right goals is the first step to your success. Learning about the ultimate goal will take your life to the pinnacle of success—and beyond!

A long time ago, in 1968, in an office far, far away (unless you live near the University of Maryland), Dr. Edwin Locke published a ground breaking study of how goal setting helps workers work better. From that research he developed his theory of goal setting that has been widely acclaimed in the business world ever since.

As others built on his work, an acronym for setting goals emerged—SMART:

Specific and stretching. For example, rather than deciding to just “get an education,” determine to “graduate from university with a degree in accounting.”

Measurable. How can I know if I’m reaching my goal?

Attainable and action-based. Is it reasonable for me to plan to become a David Beckham—quality soccer/football player when I’ve never been coordinated in my life?

Relevant. Does the goal even apply to my circumstances—or, more importantly, to my beliefs?

Time-bound. When do I want to reach my goal?

It’s smart to set goals. Dr. Locke’s goal

theory stands on a sound foundation, but let me introduce you to a greater goal-setting scholar.

“Dr.” Solomon

Specifically blessed by God to be the wisest man who had ever lived, King Solomon of Israel understood the power of setting goals even longer ago in an office much farther away.

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life,” he advised (Proverbs 4:23). Control and focus your mind and emotions or they will wreck your plans and goals before you start.

“Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you,” he continued (verse 24). To set good goals you must be truly honest with yourself, with God and with everyone else.

Next, he wrote, “Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you” (verse 25). Keep focused on where you’re going and how to get there. Goals can only be reached by concentrating on the right plan.

He followed with: “Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established” (verse 26). Think carefully in setting your goals. Then follow through to reach them. Consider this modern saying: “Plan your work—then work your plan.”

Finally, Dr. Solomon cautioned, “Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil” (verse 27). Don’t stray

from the right track by following evil impulses. And make sure the track is a right one from the start! Vertical thinkers don’t set evil goals.

Many in this present world, however, do make evil plans to commit sexual immorality, to hate and murder others, to terrorize and destroy, to lie, cheat and steal. Many accomplish these plans because goal setting is powerful stuff—for good or for bad.

Put your goals to work

Success demands good goals written down and reached.

In *Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way*, a book about effective leaders in today’s schools, author Robert Ramsey comments on the energy of goal-setting: “Many administrators don’t fully appreciate its power. Goal setting can change lives and careers” (2005, p. 36).

What’s good for teachers is also good for students. Goals can change your life too!

“Goals have built-in power because they are promises we make to ourselves to be and do better. They work best if they are written down and revisited regularly. By asking yourself, ‘How am I doing on my goals?’ you can take personal inventory on an ongoing basis” (ibid.).

He summarizes some key points about making your goals work for you and adds, “The best goals excite, inspire, and contain an element of fun” (ibid.).

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Some Young Adults Are Leaving Church

What's their gripe?
And what can you
learn from this
exodus?

by Doug Horchak

An April-May 2007 study in the United States found that young adults are leaving Christian churches in record numbers. The primary reason? They find their church irrelevant to their lives and many of its members judgmental or hypocritical.

A survey by LifeWay Research revealed that “seven in 10 Protestants ages 18 to 30 ... who went to church regularly in high school said they quit attending by age 23 ... And 34% of those said they had not returned, even sporadically, by age 30 ...

“This is sobering news,’ says Ed Stetzer, director of Nashville-based LifeWay Research, which is affiliated with the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention. ‘It seems the teen years are like a free trial on a product. By 18, when it’s their choice whether to buy in to church life, many don’t feel engaged and welcome,’ says associate director Scott McConnell” (Cathy Lynn Grossman, “Young Adults Aren’t Sticking With Church,” *USA Today*, Aug. 8, 2007).

Most current surveys and research strongly point to a couple of basic needs that are not being met for younger adults in the churches of America and the Western world: 1) the message of

their church is not meaningful and relevant to their lives, and 2) people who represent their church are perceived as not genuine or not concerned for new converts who come into the church.

For many young people, “church” has come to mean different things. And little wonder, as the branches, denominations and sects within the broader Christian world are so varied it can make a person dizzy! The message, mission and approach of the countless Christian denominations and congregations are beyond even keeping track of! Yet all claim to represent Christianity. Little wonder that so many young people find it increasingly difficult to take church seriously.

But all is not lost! If we believe that God is real and that the Bible is His Word, then we must recognize that somewhere on this earth the Church Jesus Christ began still exists. Christ said *the Church* of God would never die (Matthew 16:18). Christ also said during His ministry that the truth He and His Father revealed would be a key that identifies and sets apart true believers (John 17:17). In fact, the Bible calls the Church “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

Moreover, the Church founded by Jesus Christ was commissioned to teach a

message of real meaning, hope and man’s true destiny (Matthew 28:19-20). In other words, the gospel of the Church would be the ultimate relevant message! Question is, is this the message you hear at the church you attend?

Relevance—connecting the dots

You have likely seen simple, connect-the-dots puzzles. These are completed by drawing lines between preset dots on a page in the order of the numbers beside each, continuing until the last number is reached. When the puzzle is finished, the drawn lines reveal a hidden picture. Well, in a figurative sense, many people try to “connect the dots” with what churches teach these days to discover a clearer picture of the meaning and purpose of life. Yet based on surveys, the puzzle isn’t being solved. For increasing numbers of young people, the picture remains hidden.

In other words, try as they may, many young people find it very difficult to find relevance in the message of the church they attend. You see, when something (a message, teaching or fact) is relevant, it is useful, meaningful and applicable. You’ve likely heard some form of the duck test: “If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck.”

The same is true with meaning and relevance. People know *relevance* when they see or hear it.

Answers to life's questions

In America, despite decreased church attendance, increasing numbers of young people are looking for deeper meaning to life. Of course, this hunger to understand life is a universal desire among youth in all nations.

As American pollster John Zogby put it, many are “digging down deeper into their own lives and uncovering new wants and needs, in the way so many young adults are embracing their membership in and responsibilities to a global community ... They want more out of their lives—not more possessions, not more power, not more artificiality or engulfing lies, but more meaning and purpose, more truth, more authenticity” (*The Way We'll Be*, 2008, pp. 167-168).

Clearly, people are looking for a church with a message that translates into real meaning in their lives now. While Christ said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), many people find that their church's teachings don't seem to help them make their lives any better at all! Yet the clear message of Jesus and the inspired writings of the early Church do show that living according to God's

Word leads to happiness, fulfillment and success (Matthew 4:4; John 10:10; 1 Timothy 4:8). For more solid, relevant biblical advice, request our free booklet *Making Life Work*.

What's your opinion?

Even though you were likely not one of the young adults surveyed in April 2007, if you are reading this article you face the same challenge. Is church important to you? Do you regularly attend? As you ponder these questions, consider these facts borne out in the Bible:

- The Church that represents God and Jesus Christ will be relevant and meaningful because it will make sense out of the confusing ideas prevalent in society (Ephesians 4:11-16).
- The Church and its message do answer the most important questions of life—such as how one can be forgiven of sins and be granted eternal life (Acts 2:38-41; 47).
- The Church is a source of comfort and encouragement through its preaching of the “gospel of peace” (Acts 9:31; Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 10:15).

Even though these and other promises are made by Christ about His Church, for a growing number of people their church seems to fall short. What about yours?

Finding the real Church

What does the Bible say about the Church that Jesus Christ began almost 2,000 years ago? In studying God's Word, one can come to understand the meaning and purpose for which He created mankind. The Bible shows that this Church will be the primary tool God will use to share His message and plan for humanity.

The Church founded by Jesus will understand and teach a message explaining how God, His law and way (when followed) will lead to a life that actually *works!*

This same Church will also proclaim a message that goes beyond success and fulfillment in this life. Its message will also look to the future by describing a world without the ravages of war, the suffering of disease, the pain of starvation and the curse of selfishness and greed.

The Church Jesus founded will be genuine. This Church and its message will be relevant.

You can count on it. Christ promised it would be so. For more details, request our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.

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

Why They Leave Church and Why They Stay

Reasons cited by the 70% who left:

- Moved to college: 25%.
- Wanted a break from church: 27%.
- Found church members judgmental or hypocritical: 26%.
- Disagreed with church's stance on political/social issues: 18%.
- Spent more time with friends outside church: 17%.
- Moved too far away from home church: 22%.
- Felt disconnected to people at church: 20%.
- Only went before to please others: 17%.
- Tied up with work: 23%.
- Too busy: 22%.

Reasons cited by the 30% who kept attending:

- It's vital to my relationship with God: 65%.
- It helps guide my decisions in everyday life: 58%.
- It helps me become a better person: 50%.
- I am following a family member's example: 43%.
- Church activities were a big part of my life: 35%.
- It helps in getting through a difficult time: 30%.
- I fear living without spiritual guidance: 24%.

Source: LifeWay Research survey of 1,023 Protestants, conducted April–May 2007. Respondents gave multiple answers. Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The Three-Letter Word No One Wants to Talk About

It seems most people today don't really know what "sin" means. Two biblical festivals can help us understand why God considers sin so bad.

by Mike Bennett

Sin isn't something most people talk about very much. Many churches don't talk much about it either. *Forgiveness* is more frequently mentioned. Clara Null tells the story of a young boy who knew the connection. After a lesson on Christian behavior, she asked, "Billy, tell me what we must do before we can expect to be forgiven for our sins."

Billy replied, "First we gotta sin" (Edward Rowell, editor, *1001 Quotes, Illustrations and Humorous Stories*, 1996, p. 520).

That's the easy part! The Bible tells us that everyone sins, and that every sin earns us the death penalty (Romans 3:23; 6:23). But why is sin so bad?

Some think of sin as what we want to do but aren't allowed to do. But really it's what God says we *shouldn't* do because it will hurt us and others. God hates sin because it's like an evil disease that will ultimately make His children suffer and die. God is our Creator, and He knows what is good for us and what will bring harm.

You see, for eternity God has lived the *give* way of life—He *is* love. His way of life has been recorded in the Bible as His law—a set of eternal principles that can help us see how to love the way *He* loves.

But sin is the opposite. It's lawlessness—breaking God's laws (1 John 3:4)—and it leads to death (Romans 6:23). Murder, sexual sin, stealing, lying, warping the way God wants to be worshipped—breaking any of God's laws destroys the connections of love He wants us to have with Him and each other.

Paying the price for us

Since we have all condemned ourselves to death by desecrating the beautiful, loving relationships God has designed us to have, how can our death penalty be pardoned?

The Bible tells the dramatic story of how God set the Israelites free from slavery in Egypt. The Israelites had to kill a lamb and put its blood on their doors to alert the death angel to pass over their homes and spare their firstborn children. They were told to commemorate this great example of God's intervention and protection each spring with the Passover festival.

When Jesus Christ came, He was willing to take our death penalty on Himself, to be "our Passover ... sacrificed for us" (1

**By keeping God's laws,
we can build strong
relationships with God
and each other.**

Corinthians 5:7). Now Christians who follow the pattern of the New Testament Church rehearse Christ's sacrifice annually at the Passover festival (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

But this is not a license to continue sinning. For our good, He tells us to "sin no more" (John 5:14; 8:11). By keeping God's laws, we can build strong relationships with God and each other (Matthew 22:37-40).

Insidious sin

Even after we've repented and been forgiven, sin too easily creeps back in.

If you've ever seen bread, rolls or donuts rising before being cooked, you've seen an analogy of how sin insidiously grows. The bread is raised (leavened) by yeast fermenting the raw dough—that is, converting sugar within the dough to gas, causing it to expand. Just a little yeast will spread throughout an entire lump of dough.

The apostle Paul explains that yeast—leavening—is symbolic of sin (1 Corinthians 5:6-7). It works secretly, permeating us, puffing us up from the inside and even spreading to others. Pride—of an individual or a group—can lead to all kinds of evil, as can malice and hypocrisy, which the Bible also connects with leaven.

When Paul wrote this to the church in pagan Corinth, it seems he wrote in the spring of the year and his analogies tied in perfectly with the season. God had commanded a festival called the Feast of Unleavened Bread for the seven days right after the Passover. This festival was not just for the Israelites, as this gentile New Testament congregation in this Sin City of the ancient world also observed God's Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Paul wrote, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8).

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Marry

THE RIGHT PERSON

Key to a Successful Life

With millions of people on planet earth, finding the perfect mate is a challenge. How do you know when your "soul mate" and companion for life will pass your way?

by Larry Greider



How will you know when you have discovered the right person to marry?

The truth is that relationships are *developed*, not *discovered*. For two people to have a happy, successful marriage, it takes lots of work and some understanding of the purpose for life.

Tragically, almost half of all marriages in the Western world end in divorce. And more and more people are giving up on marriage altogether, choosing instead to live together until one or the other moves on to another relationship.

God's intentions for intimacy

This is not what God intended from the beginning when He created Adam, the first man, in the Garden of Eden. From the man He took a rib and created a woman. Of all body parts, something close to the heart was chosen to become an integral part of the human race!

Shortly after man was created from the dust of the ground, "the LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him'" (Genesis 2:18).

When Eve was presented to Adam, he said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man (verse 23). The account continues, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (verse 24).

Notice that Eve was a part of Adam's body to begin with, and after God formed her into a woman, she and Adam were to "become one flesh." While this is rich in symbolism, the choice of mate for Adam was easy. Today there are many more human males and females on the planet. So making the right choice of who is to become a couple

for life takes faith and some planning.

American author H. Jackson Brown Jr. said, "Choose your life's mate carefully. From this one decision will come 90 percent of all your happiness or misery."

From years of counseling, I have noted that one of the greatest gifts parents can give their children is the example of a good marriage that models teamwork, proper use of authority and godly leadership. After all, marriage has a deep spiritual connection to God's plan for humanity. As Paul wrote, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32).

The same apostle goes on to explain: "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:23-25). Loving service and loving submission are keys to making this most intimate relationship work.

Sharing godly goals

The challenge for young people today is finding someone who shares the goals of a godly marriage. Let me offer a few suggestions:

- Spend your time with those of like mind who have some understanding of the challenges and goals of marriage. Begin with the end in mind. To do this, you need to spend time learning about a potential partner, and that means dating others who are in God's Church, asking God to help find a mate for you.
- Date people with a variety of personalities to get to know who you can work together with best.

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Making the Most of Your Dough

In light of the current financial crisis that has deeply affected most of the world, it's time to reassess some underlying philosophies about money. Make sure you understand sound financial principles.

by Ken Treybig

Many people are talking about money and the struggling economy these days, but what difference does that make to you—especially if you're a teen or a young adult still in college or trade school? Maybe you don't have to worry about your allowance continuing, or maybe your part-time job isn't in any danger. So why worry about how you use your money—your dough?

God tells us that “sensible people will see trouble coming and avoid it, but an unthinking person will walk right into it and regret it later” (Proverbs 22:3, Today's English Version).

The financial truth is, how you treat your money today is a good indication of how you will treat it later in life. If you're careful with the smaller amount of money you have now, the odds are very good that the habits you develop will carry over to how you handle money later. All that changes is the number of digits on the left side of the decimal point!

While there are many principles we could discuss, let's focus on one basic principle: Don't waste what you have.

Sounds simple enough, doesn't it? Just get the most out of what you have. However, there's more to it than you might first think.

Wasting is done in many subtle ways. Much of the Western world has been driven by greed. Advertisers often find unique ways to make people feel incomplete, unfulfilled and “not good enough” without their product. They convince people to purchase something they don't need and cannot afford with money they don't have.

In other words, people borrow to get something today and then pay interest for years on that purchase. Controlling impulse buying is only one application of the proverb that says, “It is better to have self-control than to conquer a city” (Proverbs 16:32, New Living Translation).

Avoid impulse buying

Once a person starts down the road of giving in to impulse buying, it's almost impossible to stop. Before long the newness wears off that recent purchase, and the compulsive shopper buys more items the same way. This begins a cycle of purchasing more and more on credit, accompanied by the temptation to not pay off one's full balance each month.

Interestingly, according to the debt statistics page of CreditCards.com, 41 percent of college students have a credit card and 65 percent pay off the full balance each month. The percentage paying in full each month is higher than the general adult population, which indicates that many young people realize paying interest on credit cards

is a waste of money. However, not everyone gets it because the average credit card debt among indebted young adults rose by 55 percent between 1992 and 2001.

As a young person, what are some other ways to make the most of what you have and not waste it? First, let's look at a few proverbs. Then we'll discuss how to have fun but spend less doing it.

The importance of maintenance

All material things require some effort to keep them "at their peak." This means a person must be willing to work hard when it's time to work.

Proverbs 24:30-34 expresses it this way: "I walked by the field of a lazy person, the vineyard of one lacking sense. I saw that it was overgrown with thorns. It was covered with weeds, and its walls were broken down. Then, as I looked and thought about it, I learned this lesson: A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will pounce on you like a bandit; scarcity will attack you like an armed robber" (NLT).



Avoid impulse buying

God does not condemn relaxing and having fun at appropriate times, but He denounces laziness. A lazy person wastes what he or she has. In this case, what should have been a productive asset (a vineyard) was not producing any income because its owner was lazy when he should have repaired the wall, tended the plants and maintained the vineyard so it would continue to produce.

A similar passage says, "A lazy person is as bad as someone who destroys things" (Proverbs 18:9, NLT). The lesson is simple: Everything we own should be cared for. Even toys, musical instruments, electronics, tools and vehicles should be treated with care to protect their value and keep them productive. Otherwise they'll have to be replaced, and we will have wasted what we have.

Fun on less money

But what about when your friends want to go out to eat or watch a movie and you'd like to join in the fun? Eating out is a lot more expensive than eating at home, but you can still

do it economically with some planning.

Maybe eat something before you go so you'll be satisfied with an appetizer instead of a full meal. Or take along your favorite small flavor packet and order water instead of a drink. You can also save money by not buying a dessert and eating something later at home. Anyone who analyzes his or her finances knows that when we eat out the bill often runs up quickly with dessert and drinks.

If you're carefully watching your spending, are you doomed to never watch a movie? Certainly not, but you have to be a bit more creative to make the most of your dough. Why not share a DVD or game rental with your friends? Pool your money for the rental—or take turns renting—making sure it's returned on time, of course, to avoid any late fees (which would be another waste of money).

With some thought and perhaps scouring the Internet, you can find additional ways to make your money go further. Tips like "never pay retail by shopping sales and discount stores for bargains" or "find ways to give without spending by sending a letter or homemade card" can end up making the money you have go further.

Believe it or not, even staying healthy is a good way to make the most of what you have, because sickness usually means you cannot work, which means you lose income and perhaps drain your bank account.



Work hard at your job

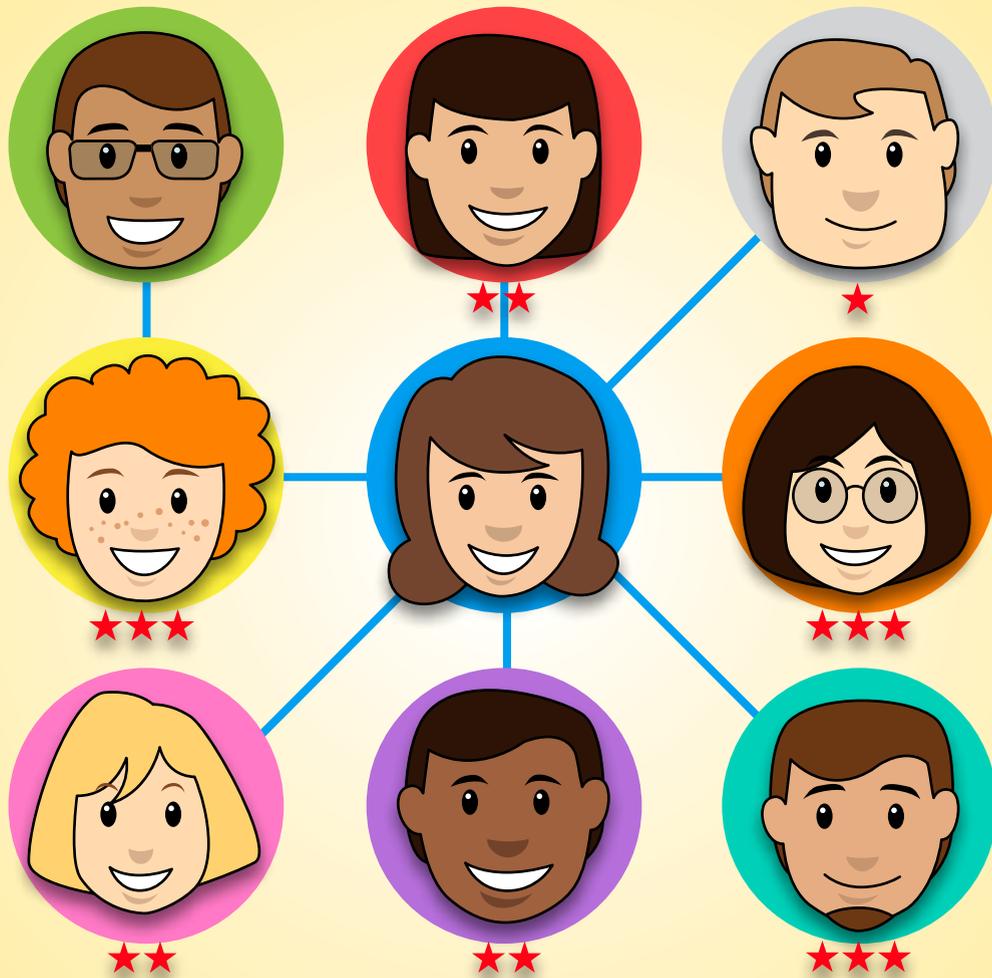


Find creative ways to have fun for less

It takes effort, but there are many ways to make the most of what you have. Interestingly, Jesus pointed out that being careful in small things has great implications in other areas of life. He said: "Unless you are faithful in small matters, you won't be faithful in large ones. If you cheat even a little, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities" (Luke 16:10, NLT). Learn to faithfully care for what you have and avoid wasting money. If you do, God will reward you with much greater things!

Ken Treybig is the national director of United Youth Camps and Challenger II programs. He is also the pastor of United Church of God congregations in East Texas and Western Louisiana.

A Friendship Manual



What do the Proverbs say about friendships?

by Dan Dowd

What does it really mean to be a friend to someone today? Much has been written and said about how our technology-driven world can alienate individuals, but when you think about it, many of the innovations in technology are focused on connecting with one another. We see this with IM, Facebook, MySpace, e-mailing jokes to our friends, and in texting and calling each other on cell phones to check up. Friendships are as important as ever.

We want friendships, but how do we make new friends? It can be intimidating to put ourselves out there. What if we are rejected or made fun of? Or even betrayed? How do we find a friend who will be a true friend—someone, as one little boy said, who knows all about you and likes you anyway?

Wouldn't it be great to have a manual, a how-to book on the topic of friendship? Good manuals are great to have when you buy a new item. Manuals show how the product is put together. They show the nuances of how to safely work the item and how to make the most of it.

Go into any bookstore or search online for manuals on relationships, and you will be inundated with possibilities and perspectives. So where can you go for a helpful, basic manual on friendships? How can you learn to be a great friend and to have great friends?

There is such a manual, and it has been around for thousands of years. It's called the Bible. There are whole sections of it that deal with relationships, and one of the best parts of the Bible to read on the how-tos of friendship is the book of Proverbs. Not only does this book speak on different aspects of being a friend and friendship in general, it also discusses the attitudes and perspectives behind being the type of friend people want.

One of the best principles about how to be a good friend is recorded in Proverbs 18:24: "There are 'friends' who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother" (New Living Translation).

What do you bring to a friendship? Being a friend involves care and loyalty. It means being truly interested in the

other person and in his or her needs and feelings. This means giving more to the friendship than taking from it. It means being there when needed (27:10), and it means being someone who is dependable (17:17) and accountable. This is all tempered with not being inconsiderate (27:14) and not gossiping (16:28) or passing along something that would hurt your friend in public (17:9; 11:13).

Good friendships include the ability to be completely truthful with each other. One of the main foundations of friendship is the absence of deceit. Such a friendship will attract others (22:11). Because of the trust already developed, a friend can be brutally honest (27:6). Rather than causing hurt, it is understood that what is said is simply to help (27:9) and make all individuals in the friendship even “sharper” (27:17).

A good friend is not all about correction, however, and uses words carefully (17:27). He or she doesn’t lash out with angry words but rather gives a “soft answer” and builds others up with what is said (15:1, 4).

The Proverbs also show us the type of people with whom we should *not* make friends. Avoid those who engage in sinful and lawless ways, we’re advised (1:10-16), along with those who “sow discord” (6:14) and those who live a lifestyle that will leave them broken (6:12-15).

The most important friendship

As much as physical friendships are important to us, there is another one that is even more important. Each of us needs a very deep and personal relationship—a friendship—with God. This can be hard to grasp in our modern world that doubts whether God even exists, but it is a necessity for our spiritual growth and the basis for knowing how to be a great friend (1:7).

In developing a friendship with God, we are strengthened (3:26; 12:2). In having a pleasing friendship with God, we will even have peace with those who oppose us (16:7). God is the perfect Friend who is there for us at the right time and even promises to protect us (30:5) and direct us (3:5-6).

The same principles that make a physical friendship work also apply if we are to have a friendship with God. Do we take His correction? Are we truthful with Him? Are we accountable and dependable? Do we give back to God the positive aspects of a friendship—listening to Him, talking to Him and building Him up with what we say? The great thing about a friendship with God is that even when we let down on our end of the friendship, He waits for us and receives us back when we repent.

Taking stock

So how do your friendships (and you as a friend) stack up to these attributes? Are you a friend who sticks closer than a brother? Are you a friend who challenges in kindness? Are you a friend people can trust?

Applying these principles may seem difficult. You may feel like you are having to carry the brunt of the relationship, but if you put these points into practice, an interesting thing will begin to happen. People of like mind will begin to gravitate to you.

How do you become a good friend to someone? It’s in the manual.

Dan Dowd is a husband, father and the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Milwaukee, Oshkosh and Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin.

Wanna Get High?

“Come on, it’s cool! Everybody’s using it. Don’t be so uptight.” Maybe you have heard others ask, “What’s the big deal?” So, is marijuana a harmless drug or a gateway to all kinds of trouble? Here are a few facts about marijuana to help you think vertically:

- U.S. government statistics put marijuana use at 23.9 percent of 10th graders. For high school seniors, it is 32.4 percent (National Institute on Drug Abuse 2008 survey, nida.nih.gov). While these numbers are high, it’s hardly “everybody.”
- Although the primary agent in marijuana is THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol), more than 400 other chemicals are present in marijuana smoke. Many are the same harmful compounds found in cigarette smoke.
- While there are no complete statistics about marijuana’s contribution to traffic accidents, the effects of marijuana are well-known: severely diminished alertness, concentration, coordination and reaction time. In this respect, driving under the influence of marijuana is similar to driving under the influence of alcohol.
- A very high number of hard drug users started with marijuana. While not every user of marijuana goes on to harder drugs, many do.
- In the United States, there were more than 750,000 arrests for marijuana possession in 2007, the latest year for which statistics are available (fbi.gov).

Although the Bible doesn’t directly address marijuana, it does address its effects. Proverbs 23:21 says, “For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.” And 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 adds, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, *nor drunkards*, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Marijuana use, as with other illegal drug use, has effects similar to alcohol abuse. Reject the instant drunkenness of marijuana.

—Dan Dowd

Answers for Genesis

W

e continue exploring the book of Genesis and the common questions asked about it. Here are the answers as we best understand them in light of the Bible.

Where is the Garden of Eden today?

No one knows for sure, because it was located in a pre-Flood landscape, but the Bible leaves some geographical clues about where it existed.

The Bible states the Garden of Eden was situated where four rivers branched out (Genesis 2:10-14). Two of the rivers mentioned in the Garden of Eden are still known today—the Hiddekel (the Tigris) and the Euphrates (Genesis 2:14). The other two rivers, the Pishon and the Gihon, are not readily identified.

It is possible, though, that two great dry river beds revealed in that area by satellite imagery could turn out to be these two ancient rivers—the Pishon and the

origin was in the land of Dilmun, a paradise where all the animals were tame and neither sickness nor death existed. They wrote, “It is a pure, clean and bright place... where the lion does not kill, nor does the wolf devour the sheep” (Samuel Kramer, *History Begins in Sumer*, 1974, p. 228).

The Babylonians called this paradise Eridu, where “Adapa” (the Babylonian Adam) lived. They said he was the seed of mankind, but later offended the gods by obtaining secret knowledge and was made mortal, thus bringing sickness upon the people. They wrote, “Near Eridu was a garden, in which was a mysterious Sacred Tree, a Tree of Life, planted by the gods... protected by guardian spirits, and no man enters” (*Halley’s Bible Handbook*, 1965, p. 66).

Archaeological evidence shows the entire area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to have been significantly populated from the beginning of civilization, and it is the region where the most ancient forms of written script—pictographic and cuneiform—have been found.

In any case, it’s probably impossible to know just where the Garden of Eden was, despite the clues we have. It couldn’t be found by archae-

ology even if one knew the vicinity in which to look, as there would be no ruins to excavate—civilization having developed after man’s expulsion from Eden.

Furthermore, the garden was part of the pre-Flood world that was completely covered with water and destroyed during the great Flood. No recognizable remains of the Garden of Eden would have survived by the time Noah, his family and the animals disembarked and began to populate the newly transformed terrain.

Still, in giving us indications of its whereabouts, God assures us that this paradise was a real place—where real history happened.

The Bible says, “Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). What happened to Enoch?

Some erroneously jump to the conclusion that Enoch was taken up into heaven, but notice the Bible nowhere says this. It simply says that God “took him.” It does

In giving us indications of the Garden of Eden’s whereabouts, God assures us that this paradise was a real place—where real history happened.

Gihon (see *Smithsonian*, “Has the Garden of Eden Been Located at Last?” Vol. 18, 1987). It may be that the Garden of Eden was located close to where the Tigris and the Euphrates converge and empty their waters, in the northern tip of the Persian Gulf.

An alternative view has more recently been presented by archaeologist David Rohl in his book *Legend: The Genesis of Civilisation* (1998), as well as in a TV documentary on The Learning Channel, *In Search of Eden* (2002). He proposes that the Garden of Eden could have been situated near the *headwaters* of the Tigris and the Euphrates—more specifically in northwest Iran. He makes a plausible argument based on linguistic and historical evidence. Yet for now the matter remains one of conjecture.

It’s interesting to read the legends that grew up in various cultures about the Garden of Eden. The Sumerians, who lived in the southern region of Mesopotamia (which means land between the rivers), believed their

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Part 4

Understanding how
God made things in the
beginning can help us
understand things now.

by Mario Seiglie

not specify *where* he was taken.

Jesus Christ later stated in the Gospel of John that “Scripture cannot be broken” (10:35). One of the points He was making was that one passage of the Bible cannot contradict another passage.

This same Gospel of John reveals a startling fact very pertinent to this matter: “*No one* has ascended to heaven but *He who came down from heaven*, that is, *the Son of Man* who is in heaven” (John 3:13, emphasis added throughout).

Clearly, Jesus Christ was the only human being who had ascended into heaven. The phrase “who is in heaven” lets us know that this was written by the apostle John after Christ’s return to heaven. So even as late as this statement, no human being—and that includes Enoch—had ascended into heaven.

We later read about Enoch’s fate in Hebrews 11:5: “By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” The word rendered “taken” can also mean “transferred elsewhere.” And the New American Standard Bible says this was done “so that he *would not* see death”—a better translation than “did not,” since we know from the same chapter of Hebrews that he died.

Notice in verse 13 the summary given of all of the men and women of faith listed here, including Enoch: “*These all died* in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). So Enoch definitely died as well as all the rest.

How then can it be that Enoch was transferred elsewhere so he wouldn’t see death? God doesn’t give us all the details of what happened, but a few scenarios have been proposed that do not conflict with the fact that Enoch died as the Bible says.

It may be that God transported Enoch elsewhere to keep him from being killed at a certain time—perhaps protecting him from martyrdom at the hands of angry persecutors who didn’t like his announcement of com-

ing divine judgment (see Jude 14-16). God likewise supernaturally transported Elijah and Philip to other places on earth (see 2 Kings 2:11; Acts 8:39).

On the other hand, we should observe that Enoch died young for his time—at age 365 while those before and after him lived into their 800s and 900s. Because of this, some speculate that God “took him” from life prematurely so that he would not have to live out his remaining centuries in a miserable world (compare Isaiah 57:1-2). His next moment of consciousness will be the resurrection. In this case, “so that he would not see death” would refer to his not having to experience the process of dying—his life ending instantly.

Still others, putting the likelihood of Enoch experiencing persecution together with his early death, have

We do know that Enoch did not skip death and go to heaven. He died, and no human being has ascended to heaven except Jesus Christ.

concluded that Enoch was murdered—martyred for his preaching. Enoch being taken and not found would then refer to God removing his body and burying it—as happened with Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). It is even proposed that the murderer was Cain’s descendant Lamech, who killed a young man (Genesis 4:23-24)—but there is no way to know if this was Enoch. In this case, Enoch being taken or transferred so that he would not see death is taken as separate matter—that of him being spiritually converted, transferred from the world’s ways to God’s way of living, so that he would not see ultimate death in the lake of fire (compare Colossians 1:13; John 8:51).

Again, we don’t have enough details to know exactly what is intended. But we do know that Enoch did not skip death and go to heaven. He died, and no human being has ascended to heaven except Jesus Christ. To learn more, send for or download our free booklet *What Happens After Death?*

Mario Seiglie is the father of four adult daughters and pastor of United Church of God congregations in Garden Grove, California, and Honolulu, Hawaii.

Poignant ... magnificent ... majestic as the Grand Canyon ... brutally compelling ... The back cover is plastered with delirious praise from a group of fawning admirers. The picture on the front is somehow ugly, depressing and boring at the same time. The pages have a faint odor of mildew. Yep, you can be pretty sure you're holding a **CLASSIC!**

You twitch and grimace, feeling a sudden hairball at the back of your throat. Your teacher said it was time to read something "a little gritty and mature." You say it's time to pull out the *CliffsNotes!*

You've heard a little about this book, and not only does it sound like a terminal case of the yawns, but the morality sounds terrible too. What would Jesus read? Well, you're pretty sure He'd have overturned the writing desks of Hemingway, Morrison, Steinbeck, Faulkner, Hawthorne and all those other writers you're being asked to analyze. So there's no reason to actually read them, right?

With all your might!

Hold your horses! I agree, it sure does seem that "highly acclaimed" and "offensive" go together. All through high school, one of my classmates produced sanitized editions of our class novels by tearing out any page that bothered his conscience—and some of those books got awfully thin. But I would suggest that much of the time, reading them is still the best idea. It's clearly the better choice if you want a good grade, but beyond that, tackling a book that challenges the way you look at the world can really make you stronger!

God tells us through Solomon, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). "But my *teacher's* hand found this for me!" you protest. "I thought the scripture was about the things *I* choose to do." Certainly. But how much time do you really get to spend pursuing your hobbies?

A key to making your day-to-day life fulfilling is to seek to grow from everything you do. A good way to make sense of this is to imagine you are trying to get more exercise but don't have any time to run or go to the gym. You would

Read What?

Taking on the Classics



Are you dreading an upcoming reading assignment? Here are some ways to approach this task with a new perspective.

by Heather Bennett

When you read the classics, you are mentally sparring with some of the greatest minds in history. If you want to learn to explain and fight for your beliefs, here's a chance to expand your knowledge and to test yourself.

probably start looking at your routine very differently—you would try to use your creativity to make shoveling snow, weeding the garden and walking to your next class opportunities to get a good workout.

Similarly, don't let the time you spend on schoolwork just spiral down the drain; make it count toward your most important life goals! Look at it this way: When you read the classics, you are mentally sparring with some of the greatest minds in history. If you want to learn to explain and fight for your beliefs, here's a chance to expand your knowledge and test yourself. Ready?

Set goals!

We don't usually *plan* to grow from our English assignments. We either sit back passively and expect to absorb whatever wisdom might be found in the literature, or we seek to avoid learning at all! The very idea of setting goals for your reading may seem a bit ridiculous, but it will help give your work purpose and direction. After you've paged through the book a bit, take a few seconds to write down what you want to learn. Add to this list as you get deeper into the book.

For instance, before I read *The Scarlet Letter*, I wanted to learn what my classmates and Hawthorne thought about sin and what deserves punishment. Later, the book pushed me to investigate how we should confess our sins and the difference between penance and repentance.

One of my goals in reading Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* was to increase my vocabulary. I made a point of looking up the definitions of words I didn't know and writing them down. It really paid off on the vocabulary portion of my college entrance exam!

Where are they coming from?

If the author is trying to get inside your head—turn the tables and get inside his or hers! Do a little research on the author's life and other books. F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda lived one nonstop party that made them utterly miserable. Could this explain some of the tone of *The Great Gatsby*?

What's the author's philosophy? Don't let yourself be indoctrinated (Colossians 2:8). Analyze the way he or she looks at the world and compare it to what God says in the Bible on these questions and others you may think of:

- Is there a God? What is He like? (1 John 4:8)
- Why is there suffering? (Luke 13:1-3)
- Are people basically good at heart? (Jeremiah 17:9)
- Where do you find truth? (2 Timothy 3:15-16)

- Is there one right way of life? (Proverbs 14:12; Deuteronomy 10:12-13)
- What is the meaning of life ... if it has one? (Hebrews 2:6-8; 1 John 3:1-2)

(If you're interested in researching these questions further, check out the free booklets *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist? Why Does God Allow Suffering? The Ten Commandments, Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *What Is Your Destiny?*)

It's often helpful to have some labels to attach to the author's worldview. Is it humanism (maintaining that people are inherently good, able to solve the world's problems through reason)? Nihilism (denying life has any meaning except what we individually give it)? Deism (presenting a God who, after creation, never intervenes)? Check out a quick summary of some of the philosophies you might encounter in the article "How Do You Think?" from the April-June 2005 issue of *Vertical Thought*.

Relevance to biblical truth

Even the apostle Paul was familiar with writings of the pagan Roman culture around him—and he was able to make use of what he learned of it in conjunction with spiritual understanding from Scripture (see Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12).

I was in the middle of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* when I ran across this very applicable proverb: "An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning will not be blessed at the end" (Proverbs 20:21). I found an excellent summary of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* in James 4:1: "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?" Often a book you've read can give you new eyes to see the depth and truth of a Bible verse.

Enjoy!

Take in the beauty of the prose itself! Paul tells us to ponder whatever things are lovely (Philippians 4:8). Allow yourself to appreciate the powerful, the poignant and the funny things that the author writes. Don't cheat yourself by just reading a summary! Who knows? You might actually like the book!

In the end, all this work will help you build a stronger foundation of understanding and get a better grade on your English paper too. Happy reading!

Heather Bennett is a freshman at the University of Cincinnati and attends the Cincinnati, Ohio, East congregation of the United Church of God.

Corin Forster (27) grew up in southern Illinois. After receiving her degree, she worked in event planning and graphic design in St. Louis, Missouri, for a few years before attending Ambassador Bible Center (ABC) in 2007. Shortly after completing her study at ABC, she moved to Hong Kong, where she is currently employed at a small graphic design studio. She and Peter were married just before the Feast of Tabernacles last year (2008).

Peter Forster (28) grew up in Melbourne, Australia. He graduated from Monash University in Melbourne in 2000 with majors in economics and strategic management. In 2001 he moved to Sydney and started working with the wealth management division of one of Australia's largest banks. His current role is head of business development (strategy, mergers and acquisitions) for the National Australia Bank in Hong Kong.

What took you to Hong Kong?

Peter: I was approached at the end of 2006 to move to Hong Kong to work on developing my company's business in Asia. After working in several roles in my previous six years with the company, I was looking for a new challenge and this presented the perfect opportunity.

Corin: Well, Pete was my main draw! From the personal side of things, we knew we needed to at least live on the same continent if we wanted to find out if we could work as a real couple. Pete had just moved here with his job, and I was doing freelance design in the United States, so I came over to try to find work.

How did the two of you meet?

Corin: We met at the Feast of Tabernacles in Italy in 2005. Although we didn't talk very much at that Feast, we kept in contact and our friendship grew over the next few years.

What convinced you to get married?

Peter: I had always felt that I wasn't mature or selfless enough to get married. But after Corin had been in Hong Kong for around six months, I went back to Australia for a week to visit family and friends and I found myself thinking constantly how much I wished that Corin was there with me. I realized at that stage that Corin really was my best friend and that I didn't want to go through life without her. It was that experience and a lot of prayer and consideration which led to my decision to ask Corin to marry me.

Corin: Pete became my best friend and confidant. He pushed me to better myself in all ways and is kind and loving. It's wonderful to have a support system like that in your life. I can't imagine my life without him.

What is the biggest difference between living in Hong Kong and your native countries?

Peter: The language is an obvious major difference. The native language here is Cantonese, which is different than Mandarin, the language spoken on most of the Chinese mainland. I actually really enjoy not being able to understand what people are saying around me most of the time. It gives me a lot more time to think and reflect introspectively. Of course, English is also spoken.



Life in Hong Kong: An Interview With Peter and Corin Forster

by David Treybig

Corin: At its core, Hong Kong is much like many of the Western cities of the world. You can get around easily, buy anything you want, and it has a lot of fun things to see and do. One thing that's different is the safety laws. They aren't as strict here as they are in the U.S. Some are lenient in a good way; some are bad. You just have to get used to it and be smart about what you do.

Was it difficult to find housing in Hong Kong?

Peter: Not for me, as I was provided a relocation consultant who helped me find long-term accommodation, and I was also provided a services apartment for six weeks after my arrival. What was difficult was realigning my expectations to the reality of living in a very expensive housing market.

Corin: When I first got here and was looking for my own housing, I found it very difficult. Hong Kong has extremely high rents, small living spaces and many apartments with less than ideal living conditions. It was incredibly frustrating.

Do you like the local food?

Peter: No. I find it really bland. The beauty of Cantonese food is apparently in the subtlety. However, it's lost on me. Fortunately, there's a very, very wide variety of food available here.

Corin: Some of it is nice and some of it smells awful. But I do try as much of it as I can and I love finding the cheap, local places where most Westerners never go. At my favorite place, the owners love it when I order the one dish I know in Chinese: beef fried noodles!

What has impressed you the most about the culture and citizens of Hong Kong?

Peter: The most impressive thing to me is this culture's work ethic. I'm also amazed that the people here can eat so much and still remain thin!

Corin: I'm impressed with the local people who are very friendly. They always have a smile on their faces and try to help you.

What challenges to your Christianity have you faced in Hong Kong?

Peter: Hong Kong is an incredibly secular society, particularly amongst most of the expatriates that live here. I know very few people here who believe in God, let alone determine it a worthwhile pursuit to live by godly principles. I think the Sabbath is probably one of the most difficult challenges as most people here are expected to work at least half a day on Saturdays and most Hong Kong people work until at least 6 p.m. on

Friday nights before going out to party.

Corin: Hong Kong is a very materialistic city. There is a lot of money here and when it's all around you, it's a challenge to keep yourself grounded and to not get caught up in wanting to compete with others for the most expensive things.

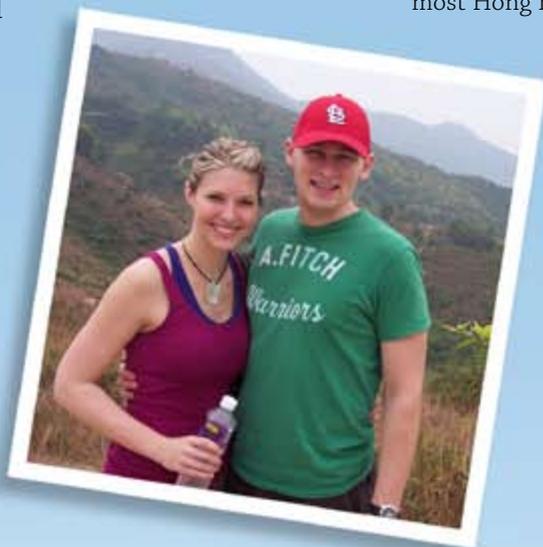
Are you able to attend church services each week?

Peter: Yes, we have church services in our apartment each week. I play hymns on my piano. With 10 of us meeting in a confined space with wooden floors, we produce quite a bit of volume. Besides Corin and me, there are eight other locals who attend with us most weeks. Since

Hong Kong is a major trading and travel hub, we also have visitors on a regular basis—which we always enjoy.

What spiritual lessons have you learned or come to more deeply appreciate due to living in Hong Kong?

Peter: The thing we both have come to most deeply appreciate as a result of living here is the importance of having the support of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Living in an incredibly secular and superstitious society would not be easy without the support networks that we have. I have a new appreciation for how difficult it must have been for Noah, Abraham, Elijah and so many other faithful servants past and present who didn't have the luxury of close support.





by Amanda Stiver

A Key to Weight Control

What decisions are you making about your long-term fitness? Will you be fit and trim or, altering an expression slightly, “fit to be tired”? How much you sleep can make a difference!

Obesity is a growing concern in the United States and around the world. It affects many people, but most frightening is the incredible increase in *childhood* obesity.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, studies show that 80 percent of children who were obese from ages 10 to 15 remained so at age 25. In addition, the obesity rate for 12-to 19-year-olds has more than tripled in the past 30 years to 17.6 percent (cdc.gov). Similar statistics are found in other countries. In Scotland, for instance, 20 percent of primary school children are overweight (scotland.gov.uk).

Staying fit and trim requires a combination of positive habits, including moderate daily exercise, eating a variety of nutritious, whole foods and steering clear of drugs, cigarettes and other substances that are habit-forming and detrimental to one's health.

It goes without saying that learning good health habits at an early age provides the basis for lifelong well-being, while wrong habits can be difficult to break as time goes by. But would you believe that one of the crucial components to staying fit and trim appears to be one that takes the least effort—sleep?

Snooze and lose

Many young people cut themselves short of sleep. Granted, it's hard to be a young person and get to bed early every night. Our friends, our entertainment and our school all need our attention. Sleep can seem like an unimportant, unproductive waste of time. Why sleep when we can be awake, *doing* something?

It turns out, sleep isn't so unproductive after all. Our bodies repair themselves and rejuvenate cells and body systems all night in a series of sleep cycles. In fact, according to a 1999 study reported in *The Lancet*, sleep debt impairs carbohydrate metabolism and endocrine function, potentially leading to diabetes (Vol. 354, Issue 9188, Oct. 23, 1999, pp. 1435-1439).

In her book *Sleep Away the Pounds*, Cherie Calbom explains that important hormones can get disrupted with lack of sleep. Ghrelin, produced when we don't get enough sleep, stimulates appetite, while leptin, released when we get plentiful sleep, regulates and balances appetite (p. 10).

Sleep is a great tool. It can give us an edge in keeping our health strong and our weight in check.

The Bible on zzzzs

The Bible says that sleep is a blessing given by God. In the book of Psalms, King Solomon of Israel was inspired to write that God “gives His beloved sleep” (Psalm 127:2).

If God presents something as a gift, it is definitely important! Of course, we also have to remember that too much of a good thing can have the opposite effect. As Proverbs 6:10-11 cautions, “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep—so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.”

The crucial lesson is to get the *proper amount* of sleep. Too much is just as bad as not enough. Individuals vary in their specific need for sleep, but according to the National Sleep Foundation, teens need between 8.5 and 9.5 hours of sleep a night to function best (sleepfoundation.org).

Creating a good habit

The toughest part of establishing a good sleep habit is getting started. Even if you are a night owl who regularly stays up late when you need to get up early, it's still possible to turn things around.

First, change your mind. Choose to think of getting to bed early as a positive experience. Consider it an investment toward good health with an outcome of feeling better, staying trim and having more energy during the day. Then start small. Choose to get to bed 30 minutes earlier each night over the course of a couple of weeks until you have achieved your ideal bedtime.

Prepare your surroundings for sleep as well. Keep lights low in your room. You may also need to turn off computers or other electronic devices. Signals and high pitched noises from these can impair your sleep if you are sensitive. Begin to wind down early in the evening. Additional keys include limiting drinks with caffeine prior to going to sleep and going to bed at the same time each night (Valerie Strauss, “Wake Up: Sleep Is Vital to Your Well-Being,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, Dec. 17, 2008).

Taking care of our bodies is our God-given responsibility (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Get enough sleep and you are more likely to feel better and remain fit and trim!

Amanda Stiver works as a freelance writer in Columbus, Ohio, and serves on the *Vertical Thought* staff.

Three-Letter Word

Continued from page 8

Paul shows here that the eating of unleavened bread and avoidance of leavening during the festival were intended to teach a spiritual lesson. Avoiding sin (represented by leaven) requires taking in the true unleavened bread in a figurative sense. The Bible describes it as letting Jesus Christ (who never sinned) live in us (Galatians 2:20).

So, as Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread approach (Passover starting this year at sunset April 7 and the seven-day festival running from sunset April 8 through sunset April 15), think about this life-and-death matter. Passover reminds us of the need to repent of sin and have its penalty covered by Jesus Christ's sacrifice. Unleavened Bread reminds us of the importance of overcoming sin with Christ's help.

These festivals of God are explained in more detail in the booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. Find it on our Web site or order a free copy to be mailed to you. And our caring personal correspondence team is always ready to answer further questions you may have.

Sin is serious. Repent. Go and sin no more. Choose life!

Mike Bennett, a minister of the United Church of God, helps manage content for the Church's Web sites. He and his wife Becky and their two daughters live near Cincinnati, Ohio.

Ultimate Goal

Continued from page 5

Let's give our lives more purpose and focus. Let's set some sample goals:

- Set educational goals—to raise your grades one grade point in the next term, to read a book on the history of your country during break.
- Set physical fitness goals—to jog a 12-minute mile (about 1,600 meters) within three months, to climb a significant mountain next summer.
- If you are working, set workplace goals—perhaps to learn a new skill on the job in the next two weeks or to read the industry trade journal in the break room every month.
- Set spiritual goals—to establish the habit of daily prayer within three weeks, to read the book of Proverbs one chapter a day for a month. (Tip: read the chapter that corresponds to each day of the month.)

Jesus Christ on goal setting

Most of the sample goals above are physical. If you set and reach them and future goals like them, you will be a

physical success. In setting such goals you would obviously know what you want—but you wouldn't necessarily know why.

Physical goals are temporary, like our mortal, biochemical existence. They give a measure of purpose and meaning to our lives, but they don't explain the *reason* we exist in the first place.

Jesus Christ told all the people listening to His Sermon on the Mount—young and old—that there was more to life than just physical things: "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" (Matthew 6:25).

We apply many of our goals and much of our effort to obtain wealth to get food, drink, clothing, shelter and entertainment. Yet these goals are just the "what" of life, not the "why." Without the "why," they are fatally flawed in the eternal sense.

The ultimate goal

Christ then described how God even provides for the flowers and birds and

how He will provide for us. "For," he said, "your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (Matthew 6:32).

Then He set forth the "why" of our existence—the ultimate goal that should dominate our lives and shape all our other goals: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

The Kingdom of God is ultimately the glorified family of God. Our goal is to live by the high standards of that family and at last become God's divine children when Jesus Christ returns soon to this earth.

So, to be in the family of God is our ultimate goal. That's why we were born!

That pop-rock lyric has to be changed for vertical thinkers: "We know what we want—and we do know why!"

To learn more about your ultimate goal, be sure to request or download a free copy of our newly expanded booklet, *What Is Your Destiny?*

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

Marry the Right Person

Continued from page 9

• Dating should not begin until you are old enough to begin a *lifelong* relationship. Sex was created for marriage and is part of two becoming one for life. Having sex prior to marriage harms your ability to later give of yourself in the way God intended within marriage. Sex with someone other than your marriage partner is a sin. When you break God's law, you are "broken." If you have made mistakes, repent and decide to follow the Creator God's instruction manual. You'll be glad you did.

• Seek counsel from those who have a good marriage and those who understand God's Word. This could save you lots of grief in the future.

Marriage is a great blessing and opportunity for human beings. It's no wonder that Satan works to undermine this building block of civilization. If you seek God's way and seek to find a mate with the same intentions, God can give you a gift similar to the one He gave Adam—a perfect complement to your life. After you find someone you are attracted to, realize it will take a lifetime of working together to develop as a team. I hope you accept the challenge and find a friend forever who will help you throughout life!

Larry Greider is a husband, father and regional pastor for the United Church of God. He also pastors a United Church of God congregation in Los Angeles, California.



Impaired Ethics

The Josephson Institute recently surveyed a sample of nearly 30,000 high school students and found that 64 percent of students cheated on tests in the past year. In addition, 36 percent of students used Internet sources to plagiarize an assignment and 30 percent of students had stolen from a store. Despite these warped behaviors, 93 percent of students felt satisfied with their personal ethics (David Crary, "Students Lie, Cheat, Steal, but Say They're Good," *The Christian Post*, Dec. 1, 2008).

Whoa! We have a problem here! Feeling okay about it does not make breaking God's commandments okay.

God's laws stand regardless of how people feel about them. Each of us will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give account for what we have done (2 Corinthians 5:10). So what's the best course of action? Obey God's commandments and feel good about that!

Bookmakers in Britain have shortened the odds on the existence of God from 20-1 to 4-1 based on the production of a new atom smasher that is hoped to help explain how the universe was created

(Martin Beckford, "Paddy Power Offers Odds of 4-1 That God Exists," *The Daily Telegraph*, Nov. 3, 2008).

>In the News<

Compiled by Amanda Stiver

Smoked Out

New findings show that smoking has dropped in popularity with teens. A survey done by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan found that two thirds of teens canvassed thought choosing to smoke reflected poor judgment. Those surveyed also felt that being a smoker made a person less attractive to the opposite sex. Smoking by teens has declined sharply since 1996 when the popularity of smoking peaked



among teenagers (Roni Caryn Rabin, "Teen Smoking Rates Decline," *The New York Times*, Dec. 15, 2008).

A positive trend like this shows the impact of many years of media efforts to depopularize smoking. Smoking is a habit that breaks God's commands to treat our bodies as a precious gift from Him (1 Corinthians 3:17; 6:19-20). We show disrespect for God and ourselves when we choose to participate in behavior that is harmful to our physical bodies, such as smoking.

TV Viewing Impacts Teen Pregnancy Rate

What you watch on television can have an impact on your actions. A



RAND Corp. study has found that among teenagers surveyed, those who frequently watched television programs with significant sexual content

were twice as likely to be involved in a teen pregnancy in the following three years.

Indeed, some of the most popular viewing material, sitcoms, have the highest rate of sexual content. While there are other factors, shows featuring sex without consequences can shape the thinking of young viewers (Laura Coffey, "Study: Sex on TV Linked to Teen Pregnancies," *MSNBC.com*, Nov. 3, 2008).

God's instructions are clear. Sex is permitted only in marriage (Hebrews 13:4). If the society around us lived according to this law, the pressures to break it would be less.

The conditions we live in today require each individual to carefully guard his or her mind (Proverbs 4:23; Philippians 2:5). If the content on television becomes inappropriate and glorifies the breaking of any of God's commandments, do the right thing and turn it off.

Flying on ... Swamp Water?

The airline industry is looking into the possibility of algae-based fuel oil. Algae are simple organisms that are easy to grow and require little food and space—just water, air and sunshine.

Researchers speculate that a blend of petroleum and algae-based fuel could be effectively produced, requiring less growing space than corn- and soybean-based biofuels need. Pure algae fuel also has potential, but blends of algae fuel and gasoline achieved a 91 octane rating—on par with traditional fuel (Les Blumenthal, "Go Green: Algae Could Be Next Hot Biofuel," *The Bellingham Herald*, Dec. 8, 2008).

Photos: iStockphoto

Costly College Challenges

Denial rates of PLUS loans, the kind parents take out to cover college expenses for their children, have risen 26.5 percent in the last year due to economic instability. This and other factors have increased the financial challenges of attending college for young people.

Many students are choosing to save money and attend a community college for the first two years of college, then transfer to a more specific degree program at another institution. A lot of money can be saved by living at home the first two years (Harriet Johnson Brackey, "Economy Cramps College Dreams," *The Columbus Dispatch*, Dec. 7, 2008).



Wait! There's More ...

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

VerticalThought.org

Spreading Happiness

Happy people make other people happy. Being around happy people increases an individual's chances of being happy, according to a study conducted by Nicholas Christakis and others at Harvard University. The study surveyed 4,700 people for 20 years to determine how emotion transfers through groups of people (Rob Stein, "Happiness Can Spread Among People Like a Contagion, Study Indicates," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 5, 2008).

The book of Proverbs had a nearly 3,000-year head start on this new survey. "A merry heart does good, like medicine" (Proverbs 17:22) is a nugget of wisdom that benefits humankind in any era of history.



Don't spend a lot of time watching television. So says Dr. John Robinson, professor of sociology at the University of Maryland, who recently authored a study on the subject. In comparing what happy people do with the activities of unhappy people, Dr. Robinson found that watching television was the sole activity measured that happy people spend less time doing than unhappy people.

New York health writer Roni Caryn Rabin reports: "Happy people spend a lot of time

Someone to Watch Over Me

Fifty-five percent of Americans believe a guardian angel has protected them from danger. Researchers conducting the 2007 Baylor Religion Survey were surprised by this statistic. Increasing secularism in America has ridiculed the possibility of intervention from the spirit world, so admitting such experiences would seem potentially embarrassing.

The study also found that 96 percent of those surveyed believed in the existence of God, which has been a stable statistic in the United States for some years (Meredith Heagney, "Poll Finds Belief in Guardian Angels," *The Columbus Dispatch*, Sept. 19, 2008).

socializing, going to church and reading newspapers—but they don't spend a lot of time watching television, a new study finds. That's what unhappy people do" ("What Happy People Don't Do," *The New York Times*, Nov. 19, 2008).

Members of churches with strict moral codes reported better attendance and more friends in the congregation than those in churches having more lax views on sexuality, according to a Baylor Religion Survey conducted by Gallup.

(Meredith Heagney, "Poll Finds Belief in Guardian Angels," *The Columbus Dispatch*, Sept. 19, 2008).

Faster, Stronger ... Smarter?

A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States found that girls in kindergarten through fifth grade engaging in 70 to 300 minutes of physical education classes weekly scored higher on school work than those who did fewer than 35 minutes of exercise. These results have prompted concern

that cutting physical education programs in schools to save money may be shortchanging students (Ann Pleshette Murphy, "Today's Topic: Health & Kids," *USA Weekend*, Nov. 21-23, 2008).

God designed our bodies with motion in mind. So it makes sense that people benefit from regular activity (1 Timothy 4:8). Evidence now indicates that being physically active keeps us mentally fit too.



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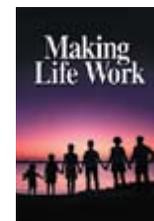
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