



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free".

John 8:32

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As practice has shown, all people come to faith in God in different ways: some are born in a family of believers, and from birth already have a clear role model; others came to faith due to certain circumstances, where no one can help but God. However, regardless of the circumstances, once a person receives some knowledge of God, there is a desire to know God's truth more and more.

When I first came across spiritual literature, it turned out to be the Gospel of John in the form of a small booklet. This was my first spiritual book, which I thoroughly re-read several times with zeal, since I had never read or heard anything like it before. It was this Gospel of John, a quarter of a century ago, that became

of God (His Word), then everything not only begins to change around you, but also within you. The Word of God really has a living power that convicts, directs, frees and corrects every person who, with all their heart, desires to know God's truth. By knowing it, you really become an independent, free person, who is subtly controlled and guided through life by God Himself. And with God, a person no longer feels oppressed and alone.

I look with great regret and pity at free citizens who have some freedoms but are in bondage to their loneliness and other dependence. It is very difficult for such people to be alone with themselves, they are far from having inward freedom. Once upon a time, for me to stay alone

each of us urgently needs the so-called personal space, where you can separate for a while and be alone with your thoughts, joys or worries. Of course, close people share these things with each other, however, almost everyone has a desire to be alone for at least a short time. For this is how a person is wired, their physical and psychological state.

As for the constant presence with God, even a temporary break is not required here. Being separated from God (His Spirit), even for a short time, a person experiences spiritual discomfort. Constant union with a person cannot even compare to what we experience when we are with God. When you have a close relationship with God, you never have a

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"

my springboard for further growth in faith. Everything that I then read in this small booklet has completely turned and changed my life, or rather, my whole worldview on this earthly life.

Probably, like many others who first encountered spiritual literature, I started asking myself a host of questions, moving from one chapter of the Gospel to another. Some things from my readings were revealed to me immediately, but some things I simply could not understand with my worldly mind. For example, when I read in the eighth chapter where Jesus said, **"...and you shall know the truth, and the truth set you free"**, I could not understand what truth meant or how I could be free while still being in a jail. Honestly, I was a little confused. I could not understand where I should even look for this truth in order to know it, that is, until God Himself showed me what truth is. When I read in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John the prayer of Jesus Christ to our Heavenly Father, I received a clear and precise answer to my question. Jesus said in His prayer to the Father, **"Sanctify them through Thy truth; your word is truth"** (John 17:17).

More than a quarter of a century has passed since then, when I received an answer to what truth really is. Today, I can openly testify that the knowledge of God's truth (God's Word) really sets a person free regardless of the circumstances or the conditions which they are in.

Spiritual freedom is not the kind of freedom that is located exclusively outside the walls of a prison. Indeed, among the so-called free citizens there are not so many spiritually free people. Today, most people are imprisoned by their own weaknesses, bad habits, aggressions, hatred, envy, condemnation, loneliness and much more. The Holy Scripture openly names such people slaves of sin. Any addiction or inability to cope with oneself is already slavery. Can a slave consider himself free? The letter of the Apostle Peter says: **"...for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage"** (2 Pet. 2:19).

I really like one saying from the Holy Scriptures, where it says: **"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"** (Heb. 4:12).

Here we can definitely say that this is true. When you start to know the truth

caused aching mental pain, because inside of me there was only emptiness. For when there is no spiritual fulfillment within ourselves, we become a prisoner and slave of anything, trying to fill our emptiness... Hence all the negative consequences, which include irritation, anger, envy, and much, much more. But, can a believer experience emptiness and loneliness inside themselves if they are really living with God? Of course not.



As an example, I will say the following. I personally, for three years in a row, was in solitary confinement. But, perhaps out of all my long years spent in prison, these three years were the most blessed for me, as each day I was alone with God and everything around was filled with His presence. I didn't for a minute feel lonely, even though there was no one else in the cell. God's Presence is not the same as the presence of a person. It's an inexplicable feeling of bliss when you are physically alone, but at the same time you don't feel lonely, even for a moment. Even sometimes the closest people involuntarily get tired of each other and, at least for a short time, want to be alone with themselves. Most people want to have their own personal space, so that at least for a short time, they could be like a snail and hide in their shell. A person, one way or another, tires another person with their constant presence, even in the best sense of the word. The closest, most loving people are periodically separated from each other, which actually, strengthens their relationship, because during the separation they manage to miss each other. And this is quite normal, because people, with rare exceptions, can't be continuously together. Basically,

desire for things like personal space. The constant presence of God is so unobtrusive that you simply dissolve in Him. On the physical level, you are alone, but at the same time you are not at all alone.

Previously, it was difficult for me to understand a way of life completely without people. But fortunately, I involuntarily presented myself with such an opportunity — for several years in a row be completely alone with God. And despite the fact that day and night I was in a closed cell completely alone, I was a really happy and free person, since God was with me. It was real freedom from sin, which included temptation, quarrels, condemnation, envy, hatred, enmity, anger and other rubbish of this world. It was in these blessed three years of my solitary confinement that God taught me to appreciate life and be happy with what I had. I really like the saying of the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Philippians, where he says: **"...I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"** (Phil. 4:11-13).

That is what God taught me. Through the knowledge of the truth (God's Word), unimaginable horizons are opened up to a person. When asked whether it is possible to be in prison and at the same time be a free person, I will answer unequivocally: yes! There was a time where I couldn't believe it myself, but this was due to me not knowing God's truth. But thank God that He chose me to be as a tool for this important ministry and has guided me with His truth, which in any circumstance or situation can make a person independent and free from sin.

Today, more than ever, God calls out to all mankind through His Word: **"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light"** (Matt. 11:28-30).

In conclusion, I want to say that by knowing God's truth, we acquire the most valuable thing — freedom from our own sinful yoke. That is why Jesus Christ is an edification to all of us and says, **"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"** (John 8:32).

I. GORIK.

CHRISTIAN NEWS

Hollywood actor Chris Tucker turns down ten million dollars role because of his Christian Faith



Comedian Chris Tucker has confused fans and the American film industry by refusing a hefty sum, even by Hollywood standards, of around \$10 million.

Chris Tucker starred in ninety films. He gained particular popularity when he starred with Jackie Chan in the film franchise Rush Hour. As a result, Tucker became one of the highest paid actors in Hollywood. However, on the last offer to star in the sequel to the popular 1995 comedy *Friday*, Chris Tucker refused. The reason is reportedly because of Tucker's Christian beliefs.

"We were ready to pay Chris Tucker \$10 to \$12 million to do next *Friday*, but he turned us down for religious reasons. He didn't want to cuss or smoke weed on cameras anymore".

According to *CBN NEWS*, Tucker was raised in a Pentecostal family and regularly attended church. Having become famous, the actor renounced his faith, but later repented, returned to faith and became a born-again Christian.

In a 2014 interview with the Canadian edition of *Straight*, Chris Tucker explained that his Christian faith helps him in comedic work.

"Being a Christian helps me in comedy", he told the newspaper. "Normally, comics talk about stuff that's easy — maybe cussing or saying something raunchy. I have to talk about other stuff. I have to dig deeper to find something that's still funny and not raunchy. It's harder. I like the challenge".

Based on *CBN NEWS*, <https://inlight.news>

What is worry? Worry is an emotional state that occurs as a reaction to some yet unknown factor which may bring a bad result. In other words, it is a premonition of trouble. Sometimes it is a causeless, unclear, indefinite experience. Sometimes worry is a reaction to a seemingly hopeless life situation with a painful outcome.

Why is childhood often associated with the word *carefree*? Because children, due to their mental development and lack of life experience, tend to not worry about the future. It is not natural for children to brainstorm *what if* situations belonging to the near future. Therefore, children are not bothered by negative scenes of problems that have not yet come. On the other hand, the life of any adult sane person is accompanied by experiences, worries and anxieties. And that's natural. The more developed a person's mental abilities are and the more life experience he has, the more clearly, they foresee future problems and the more reasons they have for anxiety and worry. Even Solomon spoke of this pattern among wise people: the wiser a person, the more mental suffering. *For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow (Ecclesiastes 1:18).*

Many famous people have also spoken about this. The French philosopher Michel de Montel wrote the following: *My life was full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened.* And the famous Christian writer Linda Dillow argues that *worry is the habit of swimming across rivers before reaching them.*

If we receive good news, then the result of this will be a pleasant anticipation, satisfaction, a surge of joy, and if negative, then sadness, disappointment, or a decline in mental and physical strength may occur. Even false information has the same effect. Worries and anxiety are a natural reaction to the information received and are a product of the human mind. They come from the future obscured by a fog of uncertainty and do not allow a person to function calmly. From unnecessary thoughts and unnecessary experiences, many people lose their health. According to medical research, there is a huge list of illnesses caused by anxiety, worry, and unforgiveness; these are heart diseases, colitis, gastritis, diabetes mellitus, psoriasis, polyarthritis, migraines, thyroid diseases, all kinds of tumors, angina pectoris, stomach and duodenal ulcers, insomnia and others.

Life holds a lot of moments we can worry about and be anxious about. We are talking about the natural reaction of a person to worldly trials, most of which occur only in the mind. But to live worrying about tomorrow is to lose today. Christ wants to help people who believe in Him to free themselves from natural and unnatural worries about themselves, about their families, and worries about tomorrow. He desires to see His children not enslaved by fears and worries, but abiding in His freedom and victory. Spiritual joy and freedom are incompatible with human fear, which is the result of not trusting God in one's life. Peace of the heart reigns where all problems and worries are given to God by faith. A person who fears for his well-being cannot fully reflect Christ in his life.

George Muller said: *The beginning of worry is the end of faith. The beginning of true*

faith is the end of worries.

Prophet Isaiah once said, *You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You: because he trusts in You (Isaiah 26:3).*

Consider some of the reasons why Christians, who should have peace of mind about tomorrow may experience anxiety and worry.

1. Separation from God

Our Lord is the God of peace (Romans 15:33; 16:20), and a person united with Him will be filled with peace of mind and peace in their heart. Such a person, mentally balanced, cannot be overlooked from the outside. His presence will calm and positively influence others,



but there will always be those people who will be annoyed by his calmness. Separation from God often occurs due to a person's passion for something sinful, or even because of an addiction to the fulfillment of their desires and goals that are objectionable to the Lord. When sin separates a person from God, they automatically lose the privilege of enjoying the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and through sin the doors are opened for demonic influence on the soul through various supernatural experiences and fears.

To restore your relationship with God, you need to recognize your sin, repent and leave it. And if relations with loved ones were violated, then you need to look for opportunities to reconcile with them. Confession of our guilt and faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ are the basis for our forgiveness when we sincerely turn to God in prayer.

Isaiah 59:1-2 — *Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.*

John 9:31 — *Now we know that God does not hear sinners: but if any man be a worshiper of God, and does His will, him He hears.*

2. Lack of faith that God has everything in our lives under the His control

When you know and firmly believe that without the will of God nothing will happen in your life, and that what happens is sent by Almighty God with a certain good purpose, then it is easier to be in God's peace. Texts from the Holy Scriptures and spiritual practical experience is our basis for such a conviction.

Someone sees the huge waves of life and dies of fear, while someone walks on the waves, not looking at them.

The Bible says: **Lamentations 3:37-38** — *Who is he that says, and it comes to pass, when the Lord has not commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That woe and well-being proceed?*

Romans 8:28 — *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him. He appointed them to be saved in keeping with His purpose.*

3. Self-love or lack of selflessness

At creation, man was endowed with free will and the right to choose, which even his Creator does not encroach on. The history of many generations and our personal experience show that people tend to abuse this privilege. Adultery, crime, betrayal, wars and the like are the results of us abusing this privilege.

One of the conditions for building a right relationship with God, for a person who comes to Him, to voluntary submit and give Him the right to choose and make decisions. That is, a person who loves God, as a token of gratitude, voluntarily gives Him the right

So don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.

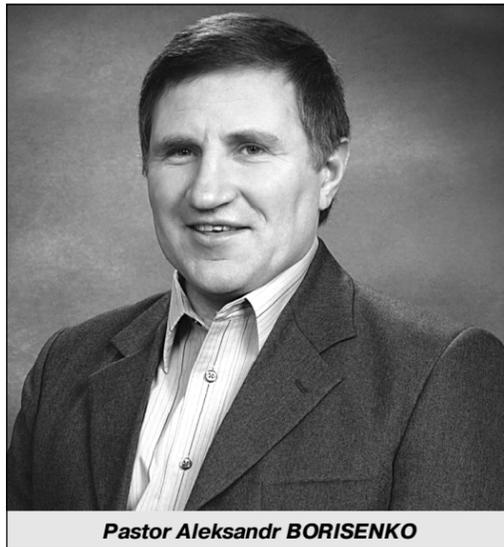
Mark 8:34-35 — *When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it".*

4. Lack of control over mind and feelings

The Christian whose heart is not filled with biblical reasoning and who does not care to have God in his mind will be a puppet in the hands of the devil, ruled

PASTOR'S WORD

WORRY



Pastor Aleksandr BORISENKO

to manage his life. And when this happens, God fills up the heart of that Christian with peace. Gone are the pressure of responsibility and fear of possible mistakes in life decisions.

Typically, a person who believes (but does not ask for God's management of their life) strives to ensure that their life passes in accordance with their own desires and plans... Such a person (consciously or unconsciously) is trying to control everything) and therefore cannot be calm for their future. The fate of such a person is not in the Lord's hands, but in their own. Such a person can be relatively calm as long as everything seems to be under his control. In order to drown out the anxiety that arises in their mind, such a person is forced to reassure themselves that everything will be as they plan. But when this does not happen, peace and composure leave them.

The Christian who rejects themselves and their will and leaves everything in the hands of God finds themselves in an incomparable advantage. And if they first of all seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, then the will of God will certainly be fulfilled in their life (Matthew 6:33). And it's the best! Who, if not the Creator, knows His creation and wants the best for it. Indeed, a selfless person has every reason to be calm. So, let's allow God to worry about us and solve our life's problems. Meanwhile we will do our part by seeking His will and enjoying life to the fullest in His grace and goodness. If we are in this kind of relationship with God, then we will be much happier and calmer.

Luke 12:6-7 — *Aren't five sparrows sold for two pennies? But God does not forget even one of them. In fact, he even counts every hair on your head!*

by base thoughts and feelings. Feelings, as a natural reaction to the circumstances experienced, will either raise a person to the skies, or lower them into the abyss of hopeless depression. Our mind should not be like a train station, through which a lot of different thoughts pass uncontrollably. Christians are called to control their minds.

1 Peter 1:13 — *Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Luke 21:36 — *Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.*

1 Peter 5:8 — *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*

Proverbs 2:1-5 — *My son, if you... apply your heart to understanding... then you will understand the fear of the Lord, And find the knowledge of God.*

Proverbs 23:19 — *Hear, my son, and be wise; And guide your heart in the way.*

5. Attachment to worldly things and temporary earthly life

Due to excessive attachment to material things, the human heart is more connected to the earth than to Heaven. Knowing this pattern, Christ said: *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21).*

For some, it is very difficult to change and look at heaven and store up treasure there. God, because of His great love for His children, has to use His arsenal of tools to help us. Some of them are the following: illness, loss, restriction of freedom, old age with its infirmities and loss of interest in life, and so on.

Philippians 3:20 — *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

In conclusion, I would like to finish the discussion on this topic with the words of the Holy Scripture: *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).*

Aleksandr BORISENKO.

CHRISTIAN NEWS

Survey: Fewer than 10 % of Evangelicals Want Shorter Sermons; 30 % Want More In-depth Teaching

Fewer than 10 % of Evangelical Protestants want to have shorter sermons during worship, while nearly a third want more in-depth teaching, according to recently released survey data.

Grey Matter Research and Infinity Concepts released a new report on January 7 titled *The Congregational Scorecard: What Evangelicals Want in a Church.*

According to the report, a copy of which was emailed to The Christian Post, only 7 % of respondents want sermons to be shorter, while 85 % believe the sermon lengths are acceptable as they are. About 8 % percent said they wanted sermons to be longer.

These trends were fairly consistent across generations, as 10 % of Evangelicals under the age of 40 preferred shorter sermons, while 11 % over the age of 70 responded the same.

Evangelical respondents between the ages of 40 and 54 were the least likely to want shorter sermons, with 3 % agreeing with this idea. Respondents between the ages of 55 and 69 were the most likely (88 %) to believe sermon lengths were fine as they are.

One of the more surprising findings was that so few Evangelicals want shorter sermons, since such a common and unfortunate stereotype is long-winded pastors, Grey Matter Research President Ron Sellers told CP.

Not only that, but we keep being informed that younger adults have short attention spans, and pastors really need to cut down their sermons to reach this population. I expected to find a higher proportion of evangelicals (especially younger people) who



wished for shorter sermons, like maybe 20 % or 30 %. Instead, it is just 7 %.

Additionally, the data shows that 30 % of respondents want more in-depth teaching from their churches, while 69 % responded that they felt the depth of teaching was *fine as is.*

Mark Dreistadt, CEO of Infinity Concepts, said that he considers the nearly one-third of Evangelicals wanting more depth in sermons to be especially surprising.

The most surprising insight was that 30 % of evangelicals want more in-depth teaching than their church is currently providing, said Dreistadt.

This demonstrates an opportunity for pastors to go deeper into the Word of God. This is good news at a time in our culture when biblical literacy is so low — there appears to be a desire among Evangelicals to deepen their understanding of biblical truth.

Michael GRYSOSKI,
www.christianpost.com

“Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness...”

Have you ever thought about what exactly Jesus Christ had in mind when in his Sermon on the Mount, addressing the people, he said: **“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”**? Many Christians are well aware of this biblical saying and even use it in their conversations. However, not many Christians actually carry out this instruction of Jesus Christ in their life. Perhaps this is due to an incomplete understanding of what the Lord said. Or, perhaps someone does not believe that such a thing can be, that if you seek first the Kingdom of God, then everything else will follow by itself. In any case, I would like to ask the question: how many have tested this in practice?

What is hidden behind these words and is it possible to unambiguously understand what was said by Jesus Christ? To begin with, it is very important to say that the Bible is the true word of the living God, in which are the keys that open the most difficult of doors

in life. Doors that always bring joy and happiness if we really try with zeal and desire to select the necessary keys to them. As you know, every word of God is **“living and active”** (Hebrews 4:12) and **“all Scripture is inspired by God”** (2 Timothy 3:16). There is nothing superfluous in the Bible and all of the instructions and commandments are left to us for our good. Approaching and attaining the Kingdom of God can only be realized through a deep and systematic knowledge of His Word and doing what it says. There is simply no other alternative for this.

Unfortunately, among individual so-called born-again Christians, regardless of location, can often notice a complete lack of understanding of biblical truths, let alone their fulfillment. For some reason, some believe that if they come to God with a one-time “repentance” to God, He must do everything for them. And what concerns all Christians, they should help them in everything. Very often people write or say phrases like this:



“I ask you, for Christ’s sake!”

When you hear or read such things, you involuntarily want to say to such people: why did you suddenly think that God or someone else owes you anything?! If you really came with repentance to God, then what have you personally done in order for someone to help you? But more importantly, why do none of you even try to practice the instruction that was left for us by our Lord: **“Seek**

first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). After all, these are not just beautiful words — this is the absolute truth, which can be confirmed by any Christian that lives according to this instruction.

The main problem and tragedy of many Christians is that they simply do not hear and do not trust the words of Jesus Christ. Having read the New Testament just once, they believe that they have fully deserved a reward from God. But after a while they are disappointed that God, in their opinion, does not hear their prayers. And no one remembers what is said in Scripture on this matter. Scripture clearly states: **“Ask and you do not receive, because you ask not for good, but to use it for your desires”** (James 4:3).

As for God, He is always faithful to His word, and everything He tells us is the truth. God has never and will never lie to anyone. This is what Scripture says: **“God is not a man, that He should lie, and not the son of man,**

that He should change. Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19).

There has never been a case where a sincere Christian who sought the Kingdom of God, was not noticed by God and rewarded. The thing is, when we completely forget about ourselves and give ourselves entirely to God’s work, while not forgetting to increase our knowledge of God’s truth, God Himself begins to take care of all our needs. It is then — completely miraculously — that help comes which you did not even plan on. In your life, real friends appear in the form of brothers and sisters, and the whole world around you becomes filled with blessings and joy. However, this only happens if we really dive headlong into what Jesus Christ said: **“Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness...”** Let the one who reads these lines hear.

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

I. GORIK.

What is the meaning of life?

What is the meaning of life? How can purpose, fulfillment, and satisfaction in life be found? How can something of lasting significance be achieved? Many people have never stopped to consider these important questions. They look back years later and wonder why their relationships have fallen apart and why they feel so empty, even though they may have achieved what they set out to accomplish. As the book of Ecclesiastes points out, many goals reveal their emptiness only after years have been wasted in their pursuit (Ecclesiastes 1–2).

In our humanistic culture, people easily lose sight of the meaning of life. They pursue many things, thinking that in them they will find meaning and purpose. Some of these pursuits include business success, wealth, good relationships, sex, entertainment, and doing good to others. People have testified that, while they achieved their goals of wealth, relationships, and pleasure, there was still a deep void inside, a feeling of emptiness that nothing seemed to fill.

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes looked for the meaning of life in many vain pursuits. He describes the feeling of emptiness he felt: *Meaningless! Meaningless! ... Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless* (Ecclesiastes 1:2). King Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastes, had wealth beyond measure, wisdom beyond any man of his time or ours, hundreds of women, palaces and gardens that were the envy of kingdoms, the best food and wine, and every form of entertainment available. He said at one point that anything his heart wanted, he pursued (Ecclesiastes 2:10). Yet he summed up life *under the sun* — life lived as though all there is to life is what we can see with our eyes and experience with our Senses — as meaningless. What explains this void? God created us for something beyond what we can experience in the here-

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

and-now. Solomon said of God, *He has also set eternity in the hearts of men* (Ecclesiastes 3:11). In our hearts we are aware that the *here-and-now* is not all there is.

In the book of Genesis, we find a clue to the meaning of life in that God created mankind in His image (Genesis 1:26). We were specially made by God, and that gives us intrinsic value; nothing can give us greater value. Made to reflect His image, we have a purpose: to glorify God; nothing can give us greater satisfaction.

Before mankind fell and the curse of sin came upon the earth, the following things were true:

- 1) God made man a social creature (Genesis 2:18–25),
- 2) God gave man work (Genesis 2:15),
- 3) God had fellowship with man (Genesis 3:8),
- 4) God gave man dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:26).

These facts have significance related to the meaning of life. God intended mankind to have fulfillment in life, but our condition (especially touching our fellowship with God) was adversely affected by the fall into sin and the resulting curse upon the earth (Genesis 3).

The book of Revelation shows that God is concerned with restoring the meaning of life to us. God will destroy this present creation and create a new heaven and a new earth. At that time, He will restore full fellowship with redeemed mankind, while the unredeemed will have been judged and cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11–15). The curse of sin will be done away with; there will be no more sin, sorrow, sickness, death, or pain (Revelation 21:4). God will dwell with mankind, and they shall be His children (Revelation 21:7). Thus, we come full circle: God created us to have fellowship with Him; man sinned, breaking that fellowship; God restores that fellowship in the eternal state. To



go through life achieving everything we set out to achieve only to die separated from God for eternity would be unthinkable tragic! But God has made a way to make eternal bliss possible (Luke 23:43) and life on earth satisfying and meaningful. How is this eternal bliss and *heaven on earth* obtained?

THE MEANING OF LIFE RESTORED THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

The real meaning of life, both now and in eternity, is found in the restoration of our relationship with God. This restoration is only possible through God’s Son, Jesus Christ, who reconciles us to God (Romans 5:10; Acts 4:12; John 1:12; 14:6). Salvation and eternal life are the gift of God when we trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. Once salvation is received by grace through faith, Christ makes us new creations, and we begin the journey of growing closer to Him and learning to rely on Him.

God wants us to know the meaning of life. Jesus said, *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full* (John 10:10). A *full* life is one that is meaningful and devoid of aimless wandering.

The meaning of life is wrapped up in the glory of God. In calling His elect, God says, *Bring all who claim me as their God, for I have made them for my glory. It was I who created them* (Isaiah 43:7, NLT). The reason we were made is for God’s glory. Any time we substitute our own glory for God’s, we become idolators and miss the meaning of life. Jesus said, *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it* (Matthew 16:24–25). And we have this promise: *Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart* (Psalm 37:4).

Are we to love the sinner but hate the sin?

Many Christians use the cliché *Love the sinner; hate the sin*. This saying is not found in the Bible in those exact words; however, **Jude 1:22–23** contains a similar idea: *Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear — hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh*. According to this, our evangelism should be characterized by mercy for the sinner and a healthy hatred of sin and its effects.

We are to have compassion on sinners for whom Christ died, and we are also to keep ourselves *from being polluted by the world* — part of what constitutes *pure and faultless* religion (James 1:27). But we also realize that we are imperfect human beings and that the difference between us and God in regard to loving and hating is vast. Even as Christians, we cannot love perfectly, nor can we hate perfectly (i.e., without malice). But God can do both of these perfectly, because He is God. God can hate without any sinful intent. Therefore, He can hate the sin and the sinner in a perfectly holy way and still lovingly forgive the sinner at the moment of repentance and faith (Malachi 1:3; Revelation 2:6; 2 Peter 3:9).

The Bible clearly teaches that God is love. **First John 4:8–9** says, *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him*. Mysterious but true is the fact that God can perfectly love and hate a person at the same time. This means He can love him as someone He created and can redeem, as well as hate him for his unbelief and sinful lifestyle. We, as imperfect human beings, cannot do this; thus, we must remind ourselves to *love the sinner; hate the sin*.

How exactly does that work? We hate sin by recognizing it for what it is, refusing to take part in it, and condemning it as contrary to God’s nature. Sin is to be hated, not excused or taken lightly. We love sinners by showing them respect (1 Peter 2:17), praying for them (1 Timothy 2:1), and witnessing to them of Christ. It is a true act of love to treat someone with respect and kindness even though you do not approve of his or her lifestyle or sinful choices.

It is not loving to allow a person to remain stuck in sin. It is not hateful to tell a person he or she is in sin. In fact, the exact opposite is true. Sin leads to death (James 1:15), and we love the sinner by speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). We hate the sin by refusing to condone, ignore, or excuse it.

Dreams have always played a special role in human history. This was reflected in the works of literature of different times and peoples, as well as in their religion. Dreams in most cases were considered by people as inexplicable actions or revelations of a mysterious Providence. Today we will get acquainted with the biblical view on the issue of dreams and their interpretation. Let us immediately note that vision and dreams are two different things. Today we will talk about dreams, not visions.

I. OVERVIEW OF DREAMS

1. Terminology of the Old and New Testaments

Dream: the Hebrew noun is *khalom*; the Greek noun is *onar*.

2. What is a dream

Dreaming is a state of consciousness during which images, thoughts and impressions run through the human mind.

A dream is a sequence of images and the like passing through the mind of a sleeping person (Webster's Dictionary).

3. Three aspects of dreaming

Man is a complex being, having a physical and spiritual beginning. Speaking of dreams, three aspects of dreams should be noted: physiological, emotional (or mental) and spiritual.

A. Physiological and emotional aspects of dreams

We are physiological beings with a body. Sleep is a necessary part of the daily schedule, during which the body rests and recovers. Most of our dreams are the result of the activity of the body: body and soul.

Very often, our brain continues in a dream to reflect on what worried us during the day. This is evidenced by the fact that many discoveries were made in a dream after a long and stressful day at work.

Often our dreams are the result of certain physiological processes in our body, such as a lack of oxygen in a stuffy room, overeating before bed, a lack of certain vitamins in the body. That is, our body is arranged by the Lord in such a wonderful way that the body tries to shout to us through certain images in a dream and suggest what we are lacking for a normal life.

B. The spiritual aspect of dreams

There are stories in the Bible when the Lord God appeared to people in a dream in order to warn them about something. For example, God warned Abimelech not to touch Sarah: **Genesis 20:3** — *And God came to Abimelech at night in a dream and said to him: Behold, you will die for the woman you have taken, for she has a husband.* Similarly, the Lord warned Laban about Jacob: **Genesis 31:24** — *And God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him: Beware, do not speak either good or evil to Jacob.*

4. Revelation from God through dreams can happen in some cases

A. The early era of the patriarchs (Fathers of the Faith)

• Jacob: **Genesis 28:10–16**.

• Joseph: **Genesis 37:5–10** (two dreams on the same topic).

B. The age of King Solomon

1 Kings 3:5–15 — *In Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night, and God said: Ask what to give you...*

C. God's communication with the rulers of the pagan world, in particular with the kings and nobles of the land of the Philistines, Egypt and Babylon

Genesis 20:2–3 — *And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. And God came to Abimelech at night in a dream and said to him: Behold, you will die for the woman you have taken, for she has a husband.*

Genesis 40:5 — *Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, both had a dream the same night, each man with his own dream and each dream with its own interpretation.*

Genesis 41:1 — *After two years, Pharaoh dreamed...*

Daniel 2:1 — *Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him.*

Daniel 4:4–5 — *I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.*

D. The dream as a revelation from God for those who are outside the Kingdom of God

• **Midianites: Judges 7:12–15** — *The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore. Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. "I had a dream", he was saying. "A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed". His friend responded, "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands". When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed down and worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, "Get up! The Lord has given the Midianite camp into your hands".*

• **Pilate's wife: Matthew 27:19** — *And while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, "See that you have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him".*

In almost all cases, when the Lord spoke in a dream to the rulers of pagan nations, He also sent them the people of God with the gift of interpreting dreams, so that they would correctly interpret dreams from God, as was the case with Joseph (**Genesis 40:5–23; Genesis 40:8** — *"We both had dreams", they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them". Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God?*

Tell me your dreams"; Genesis 41:1–32) and the prophet Daniel (Daniel 2:19–45; Daniel 4:5 — But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, saying...

According to **Genesis 40:8**, the true interpretation of dreams is from God. This is God's gift. And, as we know, God gives people spiritual gifts for edification, building the church (God's people) and glorifying the Lord.

II. OLD TESTAMENT ABOUT DREAMS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

1. Dreams and Old Testament prophets

In the days of the Old Testament, the ability to interpret dreams was associated with the Jewish prophets: **Numbers 12:6–8** — *He said, "Now hear My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, will make Myself known to him in a vision. I will speak with him in a dream. It is not this way for My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My household; With him I speak mouth to mouth, That is, openly, and not using mysterious language, And he beholds the form of the Lord. So why were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses".* According to this verse, God most often reveals himself to

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prophets in visions, in dreams, and clearly (face to face).

However, the Word of God forbids believing all dreams as prophetic. The people of God were called to recognize false prophets and not to believe their prophecies: **Deuteronomy 13:1–5** — *If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, of which he spoke to you, saying, "Let's follow other gods (whom you have not known) and let's serve them", you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken falsely against the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to drive you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall eliminate the evil from among you.*

2. Interpretation of dreams as a kind of fortune-telling

Dreams and their interpretation are often a means of deception and a form of fortune-telling.

Zechariah 10:2 — *For the household idols speak deception, and the diviners see an illusion And tell deceitful dreams; They comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep, They are wretched because there is no shepherd.*

Jeremiah 23:25–32 —

"I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!' How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their ancestors forgot my name through Baal worship. Let the prophet who has a dream recount the dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the Lord. "Is not my word like fire", declares the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" "Therefore", declares the Lord, "I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me. Yes", declares the Lord, "I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, 'The Lord declares'. Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams", declares the Lord. "They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least", declares the Lord.

The revelation that the Lord gave to the prophet in a vision, and not during sleep, was most often valued more than revelation in a dream. And this is no coincidence. The Lord forbade turning to fortune-tellers, soothsayers and divinations, who during their sessions used chemical and biological substances that put a person into a state of trance or hypnosis, that is, a kind of sleep. The Lord calls us to be sober and to be sound worshippers, not superstitious fanatics.

In the history of mankind there have always been, and will be charlatans posing as God's vessels, having the gift of interpreting dreams. There are even special books that interpret dreams — dream books. But the Lord gave us the Bible, the Word of God, by which we must measure our lives.

3. Two periods in the Old Testament era of dream interpretation

The Old Testament describes two special cycles during which dreams were interpreted by experts with a special gift from God.

The first cycle refers to the time of Joseph's life: **Genesis 37:5–10** — *And Joseph saw a dream, and told his brothers: and they hated him even more.*

The second cycle refers to the life and ministry of the prophet Daniel (**Daniel 2**). The dreams of these two periods belong to the category of prophecies about the future.

III. THE NEW TESTAMENT ABOUT DREAMS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

1. Cases of dreams from the Lord in the New Testament

A. Dreams Joseph had (husband of the Virgin Mary)

The Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and warned him of the birth of Jesus: **Matthew 1:19–21** — *And her husband Joseph, since he was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had thought this over, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do*

not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son; and you shall name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins".

The Lord also warned Joseph in a dream about the danger threatening the baby Jesus: **Matthew 2:13** — *Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to kill Him"; **Matthew 2:19–22** — *But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead". So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was**



reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee...

B. The dream of the wise men from the East

Matthew 2:12 — *And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed by another way to their own country.*

C. Dream of the wife of Pontius Pilate

Matthew 27:19 — *And while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, "See that you have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him".*

2. Fulfillment of the prophecy of the prophet Joel

Acts 2:17 — *In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. This verse from Acts is a quotation from Book of Prophet Joel (2:28): And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.*

It should be noted here that the Word of God does not promote dreams and the practice of interpreting them. Remember the circumstances under which the apostle Peter quoted a passage from the Book of the Prophet Joel? He did it on the day of Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit poured out onto earth. It was the day when God the Holy Spirit descended to earth to dwell in man. Earlier, in the Old Testament times, the Lord's Spirit lived only in God's chosen vessels: kings, priests and prophets. These were vessels from the large Israelite people. According to **Numbers 12:6**, God revealed himself to them through visions, dreams, or while awake. **The purpose of the words of the prophet Joel**, repeated by Peter on the day of Pentecost, is not to propagate

dreams and visions, but to testify that a new era has now come into the history of mankind, where the great God will dwell within man — with everyone who opens his heart to Him, be it a man or a woman, a young man or an old man. That now every person in whom there is God's Spirit will be equated with a prophet.

The Lord can reveal Himself to a person in a dream, in a vision, or with one's own eyes. However, we must not forget that God mainly reveals Himself to us through His holy Word, the Bible: **Hebrews 1:1-2** — *God, who at many times and in various ways spoke to the fathers of old by the prophets, in these last days has spoken to us in the Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also made the world.*

Jesus is the Living Word of God the Father (**John 1:1, 14**).

The Word of God is the standard against which we compare all prophecies, visions and dreams. They are rejected if at least in some way they do not coincide with the Bible or diverge from what is written in it.

IV. ADDITIONAL REMARKS ABOUT DREAMS

1. The reason for dreams from the Lord

A. Guidance

Acts 2:17 — *In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.* It says here that the purpose of dreams is guidance.

Pay attention to the fact that the Lord will admonish **old men** with dreams. In Greek, the words *old men* means *elders* or *pastors* (in this case, the Greek word *presbuteros* is used, from which the English word *presbyter* is derived).

B. Saving from spiritual death

Job 33:14-18 — *For God does speak — now one way, now another — though no one perceives it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on people as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn them from wrongdoing and keep them from pride, to preserve them from the pit, their lives from perishing by the sword*

So, the purpose of dreams from the Lord is as follows:

- ☉ steer a person away from a catastrophe,
- ☉ remove pride from them,
- ☉ save their soul,
- ☉ save their lives from premature physical death.

2. Dreams and service to the Lord

The Word of God warns that due to verbosity and many dreams, the service of God turns into vanity. Therefore, we advise you to be guided by the following biblical motto in relation to dreams: **Ecclesiastes 5:6** — *For in the multitude of dreams, as in the multitude of words, there is much vanity; but you fear God.* This verse is very reminiscent of the words of Jesus Christ in **Matthew 6:7**: *And when you pray, do not talk too much like the Gentiles, for they think that in their verbosity they will be heard.*

3. Man cannot force God to answer him in a dream

No matter how hard a person tries, he cannot force God to answer him in a dream. An example is the story of King Saul: **1 Samuel 28:6** — *And Saul inquired of the Lord; but the Lord did not answer him either in a dream, or through the Urim, or through the prophets.* King Saul rejected the Word of the Living God, and therefore the Lord God rejected Saul.

This story is a lesson for all of us. If you reject or do not fulfill the living Word of God — the Bible, and what is written in it, then do not hope that the Lord will speak to you in a dream. He has already said in Holy Scripture everything you need to know for salvation and a godly life on earth.

V. COMMON MISTAKE ABOUT DREAMS

Misconception #1: All Dreams are God communicating to man.

Our answer. If this is the communication of God with us, then why are there misinterpretations of dreams? Are we supposed to guess what God meant? What about forgotten dreams? What about people who don't dream? What about those who don't sleep at all? God does not communicate with them fundamentally?

Misconception #2: Dreams are one of the main ways God has chosen to communicate with us, and we should give them the attention they deserve!

Our answer. If dreams are the main way God communicates with us, then what place does the Word of God have in God's communication with us? Why do we need it if God speaks to us through dreams?

Misconception #3: God comes to man by speaking directly to his heart and spirit through his voice, prophecy, dreams, vision, and anointing.

Our answer. Nowhere in the New Testament is this thought confirmed. On the contrary, in almost all the books of the New Testament, the emphasis is on the Word of God (Scripture), and not on dreams and visions. Although God can speak that way.

Misconception #4: The heart of a person who has a dream will "confirm" and say: "That's right!" — when it hears the correct interpretation.

Our answer. It is not our heart that should be the key in interpreting dreams, but the Word of God. The human heart, by definition of the Bible, is deceitful and extremely corrupt: **Jeremiah 17:9** — *The human heart is deceitful above all things and extremely corrupt;* **Matthew 15:19-20** — *...for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemy — this defiles a person... That is why our heart cannot be a standard. Only God Himself and His Holy Word should be for us both a standard and an authority in our life.*

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<http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/096.htm>

DISCONNECTED FROM REALITY

I always want to get to the bottom of things and to discover what makes them *tick*. Many years ago I remember the confusion I felt as I tried to understand about God, church and the Bible. I was trying to be *spiritual* by having *faith* in a God that (in my mind) there was no evidence for and was not necessarily real — but worth believing in all the same! I had never heard of the idea of a young universe (the true and biblical history of the world), just millions of years of evolution. So, even though I had not thought about evolution much, it was the only foundation I had to build on. With a logical mind, I became very frustrated as there seemed little sense to it all!

Then, about 19 years ago *the lights came on in my head* as I read my first book from CMI. The Lord showed me that it's very reasonable to believe that His Word is speaking about actual historical facts in **Genesis 1-11**. It was a revelation I will never forget. Things fell into place and I could see *the big picture* history of the world coming into focus once the real facts were presented to me. They made sense immediately.

GENESIS IS NOT A SIDE ISSUE

Over the last several years, I have been seeing a pattern emerge. It is partly the situation Andrew Calder describes about the four academics who lost their confidence in Scripture. The pattern I am seeing is the promotion of a faith that is disconnected from what is real and factual in favour of a faith that is based on emotions, feelings or experiences. The problem is that, like the four academics discovered, and me too, once the biblical historical facts are undermined, the Bible is then disconnected from being *real*. It is then but a short step to reject the Christian faith altogether.

David Williamson (an internationally renowned Australian playwright) had just that experience. He said, *I went to church in suburban Melbourne and had an intensely religious phase until I was 12, but then I heard the theory of evolution and it cured me of any idea we were God's children.*

His experience confirms that the early history of the Bible (origins) is *not* a side issue! It's foundational! Many, many people have had the foundations of their faith undermined by false teachings on origins, namely the idea of evolution and long ages, and there are many, many tragic examples of the personal consequences on this website.

However, not everyone who hears of evolution chooses to reject God. But if they are not informed, they are faced with the problem of reconciling evolution (which they think is *scientific* and thus factual) with Scripture, which it so obviously contradicts. Not realizing that evolution is a false teaching, they often resort to playing, on a sub-conscious level, a spiritual game of belief in something that no longer makes sense.

Few would admit, or possibly even realize, this of course.

Frequently, they convince themselves that this is somehow a *step forward* in faith — after all, haven't others seen the same problems in the Bible? Those who ask questions like, *Where did Cain get his wife?*, *Where did the races come from?*, *What about fossils and millions of years?*, *Where do dinosaurs fit in the Bible?* etc., are often seen as a problem, and may get a fob-off answer — a compromise that mixes the Bible and millions of years. Or they may be made to feel that they lack faith by asking such questions.

Atheist and humanist Dr

the Bible was mentioned, one man said that he didn't like reading and hardly reads the Bible. The leader said, *I give you permission not to read the Bible.* I was amazed. If we don't know Scripture, then how will we *test the spirits*? He needed to be encouraged to ask the Lord to provide a desire and hunger to read the Word — not to be given permission *not* to read it.

I know of a 17-18 year old girl from a broken home, with non-believing parents and abuse, who became a Christian. Within a short time she asked a church leader if

this meant she should give up sex (she was not married). He told her to *pray about it!* Again, I was astonished. Here was a new Christian still confused about things in her life, asking for guidance on a black-and-white issue in Scripture. She should have been given a clear biblical answer. When we lose our confidence in the reliability of God's Word we are only left with wishy-washy answers!

This philosophy of placing *prayer* as authoritative over Scripture seems to be popular in many parts of the church. Those who promote it may feel they need to because *the Word has parts that are too challenging*. But when we step away from the reason and logic of Scripture we float away like a boat tossed back and forth by the waves, and

blown here and there by every wind of teaching (Ephesians 4:14). It opens the door for feelings, emotions and senses to take hold. We must not forget that we are fallen sinners whose feelings cannot be trusted without testing them against God's Word.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

People (Christians and unbelievers alike) want answers that make sense of the world around them. Many will open up quickly when shown that Christianity is built on truth, reason and good sense. They may not change their minds immediately as there are likely many false ideas to undo. But I make a point of telling them about Creation.com or giving them a Creation magazine to take home. We should *always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have (1 Peter 3:15).* When we plant the seeds of truth from God's Word in people's minds then God will do the growing in their minds and hearts.

Christianity is based on the *truth* of God's word — not emotions or feelings, which we know are fickle. As we learn the Word and keep it in our heart we can test what we are experiencing against Scripture to make sure that we are not deceiving ourselves.

We were created to love our God with all our mind. We can therefore stand boldly on God's Word knowing that if He states something, then it is true (no matter what the popular idea of the day is). *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105).*

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TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

This is a testimony of my repentance and finding God. His relationship towards me is especially dear to me, he gave me freedom and life. I grew up in an adequate family environment. At times, I was pampered when growing up. I spent my childhood and teenage years on the street. I started smoking with my friends when I was 8 years old, and spent most of my days being on the streets and was no longer afraid of parental punishment. I got my first tattoo when I was twelve and that made me think that I was an adult.

I attended school off and on until the seventh grade, and then completely dropped out. By a sheer chance, school officials gave me a credential saying I finished middle school with honors and sent me out into the world. I believed that I had the right to lead my life the way I wanted. At that time, my dad passed away. My mother took care of my younger brother and sister, but there was not enough time to take care of me.

I really wanted to be an adult, so I began to act like my older friends. We were getting intoxicated and I was enjoying it. While being intoxicated, I felt bold and strong and could talk to seniors as if I was their equal. They diligently taught me street life. Some of them have already been in prison. I was mesmerized by this lifestyle. I learned to steal and was very successful at my trade. I wanted respect and honor. Unfortunately, money was needed to gain all that. The love of money was in my heart, but did not have any desire to work for it, so I began to look for easier ways to make money. I started cheating, stealing, and racketeering. My heart became as hard as a stone, and I had a false sense of significance and importance.

The police kept an eye on me for a long time. A lot of people tried to instill common sense into my unyielding mind and that included: police, my mother, my relatives, neighbors, and people against whom I committed crimes. My life was going downhill fast, but I didn't care. I did not listen to anyone and did not think about my future. Those individuals tormented me until adulthood. By that time, I already had enough crimes on my account for which I could be imprisoned. I had even been on probation, but, unfortunately, I did not choose the path of amending my wrongs. When I got convicted for the first time, I was extremely proud of it. If I had chosen a different lifestyle, consequently I would not have been imprisoned for so long. Blinded by darkness, seeing no way out, I mentally agreed with this lifestyle I was offered and began to settle down in incarcerated existence. Evil spirits of malice, envy, betrayal, hatred, deceit reigned in that place. I lived in agreement with those spirits by asserting my evil self.

I had fragmented knowledge about God, but who Jesus Christ was, I did not know. I didn't need Him. But one day, out of this world people caught my attention when I was in prison. They differed from the rest in that they lived and behaved differently than everyone else. Those young guys refused to fight in war out of their faith in God. They were not allowed to preach. I will never forget what one of them did for me.

Somehow my shoes were torn, there was nowhere to get a new pair, and I was not used to asking someone. A Christian guy offered me used like new shoes without asking for anything in return. I took it for granted without even knowing his name. I presumed that everyone owes me. Even then, Jesus Christ Himself was attentive to me and began to take care of me, but, unfortunately, I was oblivious of that.

My first prison sentence went by quickly. I was fascinated by my prison experience. Prison experience gave a certain meaning to my life, even though I had pledged that I would never go back to jail again. At that time, it never occurred to me that this was just the beginning of a mindless and meaningless lifestyle.

Before my prison release, the mother passed away. My brother and sister were taken to an orphanage. I was left all alone. Lived the way I liked. I enjoyed

my lonely lifestyle and did not like to be controlled. I thought that I was the master of my destiny and I lived as I wanted. I wish I had known of what was coming next.

I wasn't free for long. Soon I received a longer sentence. However, I did not despair. I did not even make plans for the future, showing everyone that a home, wife, children, career are not for me. Although, I dreamed about it, I did not want to look like a weakling. *A man like me, I thought, must be strong and toothy, like a wolf.*

When my time of release was approaching, I had no place to call my home. The certificate of release and

But the heaviness settled deep in my heart and did not let go of me. I felt so much pressure from within. My soul was in pain. I tried to get rid of this pain by drinking vodka, using drugs, and the like. People have not yet come up with a remedy for this pain. When a person is in a tunnel with no way out, he or she does not see any light. Death is the only option available. I was suicidal, but still trying to find answers to my questions. I had a lot of unanswered questions. Why am I not like everyone else? Why am I unhappy? Why did I spend half of my life in prison? Why can't I see a way out? Why? Who can provide answers?

WE ONLY LIVE ONCE



police supervision were my reward for all the suffering that I went through. I got a hostel bunk-bed and even got a job. Every day people encouraged me to give up this lifestyle. Unfortunately, I made up my mind to remain true to my belief system, and I was not going to change anything in my life. People tried to talk sense to me through the fear of a new jail sentence, but that did not help. On the contrary, prison became my second home. My values and ideals were understood there. I knew how to live there and felt like fish in water. Soon this prison pond sucked me in again. My jail term was short, there was no time to think. At the end of the jail term, I somehow started dreaming to have a decent life and a family. When I was released, I was completely oblivious of the notion of freedom.

To make a long story short, I was imprisoned for seven more years. My jail friends greeted me with joy. At that time, I was in no hurry. With my prison experience, I resembled a wolf within: very angry, envious and full of hatred. I had dreams of freedom and I made plans, but I was going with the prison flow.

Christians started visiting the place of my incarceration. They preached the Word of God. Personally, I did not take them seriously, although I often thought about God, in particular in one prison in the town of Kulgachi where the imprisonment experience was very tough that I could not adapt to the prison environment.

There were some old convicts that suffered from tuberculosis, many of them did not get out of bed. They have been there for thirty or forty years, and when they were young, they also had dreams of a happy life. The following thoughts bombarded me: am I really going to live like this? Who needs me? And My soul was in so much pain that I wanted to howl.

I did not stay long in Kulgachi town and soon after I came back. Once again, I was surrounded by my jail buddies.

I asked my friends about it, but they had no answer, and some even thought that I was crazy. At night I no longer had dreams, but quietly cried. I thought about how to commit suicide in order to free myself from this pain, unhappy life, soul-piercing questions. I saw death as the only way out, but the desire to live still prevailed.

Unexpectedly, I met my old jail buddy. I knew him very well. I offered him to have some fun, but he refused saying that he neither drinks, nor smokes and he was no longer the person I once knew. He began to talk about God and Jesus Christ who saved him. I could never understand him, and I often argued with him. Deep-down in my soul I envied him that he had something that I did not have. In a short time, he changed a lot, but I could not understand how he did it.

I had a lot of questions in my mind. What happened to him? His acts and deeds were evil in the past, how could he change his life? How did he start living differently? This was incomprehensible to me. I did have a great desire to have what he had. How do I achieve this? Where do I get this strength from? How do I change myself?

Having lost all hope, I approached him and offered to talk. We went down to the basement. I told him about my issues. I remember how he stood and prayed, and I sat at the table, crying and talking about my life, about my failures, about my pain. Then I fell on my knees and began to ask for help from the One Whom I did not see. But He saw me, knew my life and understood my suffering. The one who died for me two thousand years ago and resurrected was with me in the basement and heard the cry of my soul. That was Jesus Christ. He always comes when He is called upon and, especially, when it is difficult, when there is a dead end and when everyone is nowhere to be found.

I began to repent of my sins, lamenting and crying before God. Tears

of extraordinary joy flowed down my cheeks. The pain was gone and I felt very light. The stone was rolled away from my soul. I realized that God is alive, that He exists, and that He knows me. My friend rejoiced with me and thanked God for me. Some may think that I'm crazy. And I really used to live like a madman. I did a lot of evil and boasted of it in front of my friends, offended people and considered myself fair, took away things that belonged to someone else and justified myself. Only an insane person can live like this. And that madman was me, wandering in darkness for many years. I was already like a dead man, but Jesus saved me. He gave me everything new and gave me eternal life. I got hope.

From that time on, my life began to noticeably change. I began to read the Bible and began to understand what was written there, although I had read it before and could not understand anything. It was after repentance that I began to change and understand the Bible, and before that it was impossible! I was sure that Jesus always heard me. I often asked Him and He quickly fulfilled my desires. Miracles happened right before my eyes, and Jesus did it all. Soon I became a different person and others noticed it. My heart was light and happy. I was confident in the future, although I did not know and could not understand how it would all be, but I trusted God with my life. I became a believer. I found the meaning of life and got answers to my questions. I realized what was missing in my life. I didn't have Jesus in my life. Now He is my Lord and my life belongs to Him.

I began to attend services, where I met believers who came to prison, and made real friends. I was told about the church of Jesus Christ. It was so amazing to hear that there is a place on earth where people love each other, care for each other, do no evil and where people live by faith and hope. Then I was invited to a rehabilitation center. It was in that place where a completely different life began.

Frankly speaking, it was very hard for me after having done so much evil in the past. Everything around was new, everything was different. I had a hard time dealing with ministers, myself, spiritual highs and lows, prayer life, humility and pride. But God loved me so much that He gave His Son to die in order to save me. He continuously had mercy on me and forgave me, taught and chastised me, and again had mercy. Glory to Him for everything!

I was in rehab for three years. I received water baptism and became a member of the church of Christ. Many brothers and sisters prayed for us former criminals whom God began to bring to church. Many thanks to all my brothers and sisters who ministered to me so that I would have peace with God today. He gave me a wife and children, gave me a family. We all serve Him. God has given us everything we need to live here on earth. I earned money for a car with my own hands and built a house. With hands that used to do evil, now I do good. And in eternity, we too will be with Jesus.

All my dreams of a happy life did not come true because I did not know what happiness was. However, I got more than I wanted, and even what I did not dream of. All this was done for me, personally, by Jesus Christ. The devil is put to shame and all he wanted for me was death. Glory to God for He gave me life.

I am grateful to God for the brothers who came to prison and preached the Word of God to me, who prayed for us prisoners. Most of the time, they did not even know us personally but they accepted us as we were, and cared for us in every possible way and were patient with us and granted us forgiveness.

Now I serve God and I am a prison minister. My wife ministers to sick people and helps in the women's care center. My children kneel down every day with us and pray for each one of you.

Serhii POKOTILO, Ukraine,
<https://facebook.com/turemnykapellan>

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

WITH JESUS I FOUND MEANING IN LIFE

Just recently, in 2014, I opened my heart to Christ. And before this important day, I lived a meaningless life. For thirty years, I was addicted to alcohol and drugs. This lifestyle led to the fact that I often broke the law and, as a result, served in prison three times, for a total of more than fifteen years. I always knew that there was a God, occasionally I even visited an Orthodox church, lit candles, but I did not know Him and did not believe Him.

After the last release from prison, I realized that something needed to change. I asked myself a lot of questions that I didn't even want to answer honestly. I asked myself (or rather, even God, about whom I did not want to know anything): *Why did I live my life so incompetently? Who is to blame?* You won't believe it, but I've always found someone to blame for my troubles. The first and foremost culprit was my mother, then the dashing nineties and so on. I've always been a victim in my eyes.

Thank God that where I lived was a house church lead by my former colleagues in public life. I didn't understand what had happened to them, but by their consistency they literally made me ask them questions. For five or six years, they testified to me with their way of life, their life was consistently good, mine was like

a cardiogram in a sick person: consistently bad, with deterioration. I asked the same question: *How? What's the secret?*

One of these acquaintances of mine from a past life spoke very persistently and patiently about my possible liberation from meaningless existence. He said that Jesus Christ had set him free. Because of his selfless love for me, I believed that I couldn't do without the intervention of something more than my own strength. My own strength was gone, I was rolling down and wanted to die.

But then the day came when, putting aside my pride and convictions, I asked my friend to bring me to the center for helping drug and alcohol addicts. While there, I saw guys like me — broken, lost, with no hope. But there were two ministers who showed me so much attention, so much inexplicable love that I couldn't understand it. And I began to speculate



why they were acting and doing all this. I have nothing to give them, I don't have anything at all to interest them. I plucked up the courage to ask why they were doing this to me. *Jesus, who saved us, encourages us to do so!* — was their answer. It was He who guided their actions, it was Jesus who gave them the desire to help the same sin-deceived guys as they were.

As a result, my life changed, I became free! Free from fear for my life, for my future. With Jesus, I found meaning in life. I have become concerned about the lives of other people, those who die in this sinful world. Now I serve in the Christian center for social assistance *Living Word* of the city of Kharkiv, to which I was once brought and in which I came to know God's grace. Now my life belongs entirely to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. He saved me. In Him I found joy for life, found Life itself.

Today, I serve the same guys I us to be. From them I hear the same questions that I once asked myself, and now I always know what to answer them. For three years I have been a member of the local church, my relations with my loved ones have been restored, my health has been restored, I am a student of the Kyiv Theological Seminary. And today my life does not belong to me, but to God.

And Christ died for all, so that the living may no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and the risen one (2 Cor. 5:15).

I trusted Him completely. At the moment, I do not yet have a family and therefore my life is one hundred percent dedicated to God. Now, whenever I meet guys with problems, I tell them that everything can be changed and that there is everything necessary for this, you just need to plead guilty before God and decide not to sin, and God will do the rest.

...And it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And that now I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me (Gal. 2:20).

Volodymyr YEMELYANOV,
Ukraine,
zhivoe-slovo.org.ua

I WAS DYING, BUT GOD SAVED ME

My name is Pavel Vilisov. I'm thirty-one years old. I was born and raised in a good family, I had everything I needed for a full happy life.

In the nineties, my youth was carefree: motorcycles, gatherings in basements and so on. That was the order of the day for me. Together with friends, I drank beer, smoked cigarettes, marijuana.

At nineteen, I got married and soon my wife and I were using heroin.

Working in a mine that was prestigious enough, I thought I had accomplished more than my parents and was happy with everything. Then we had a son, but even after that, we didn't stop using drugs. After a while, I lost my job and my life went downhill.

Drug addiction undermined my wife's health, and when she became pregnant with her second child, she began to think about abortion. She understood that despite the harmfulness of addiction, she would not be able to leave drugs and, accordingly, would not be able to be a full-fledged mother. However, I insisted on childbirth — so we had a daughter.

Having my second child didn't affect me in any way. I continued to lead an immoral lifestyle, and I began to have a lot of run-ins with the police. So, my wife and I broke up.

I had heard from my friends about drug rehab centers, but I was firmly convinced that it was not for me. Also, by this time, I had resigned myself to the idea that I was probably going to die. Maybe I'll live in prison for a while, but not for long. However, an incident that occurred one autumn day is deeply embedded in my memory. I walked down the street sloppily dressed, feeling unwell. Suddenly, two magpies circling over me like predatory

monsters began to attack me. That day I felt the icy breath of death next to me, breathing almost into the back of my head. After taking a hefty portion of alcohol and drugs that day, I don't know how, but I woke up at two o'clock in the morning in the woods. I went to a friend's house and fell asleep.

Strangely enough when I woke up in the morning, I realized that I would die if I did nothing. Remembering the

and alcoholics like me, and I loved it. But I remembered that outside the walls of the institution I have a family: a drug addicted wife and two children. I had to make a choice: stay in rehab or leave to go home and support my family. But the guys assured me that if I was saved, then all my relatives would be saved. I decided to stay and go through rehabilitation, serve God, and pray for my wife and children.

How wonderful it is when God answers our prayers: I soon learned that my wife was also in rehab. Now she sings in the church choir with my children. The expression *Thou shalt be saved, thy whole house shall be saved* was prophetic to me!

Soon after these events, I went to Mezhdurechensk to do missionary work. After Mezhdurechensk, I went to Novosibirsk to study at the Bible school. My studies contributed to my spiritual growth and the development of a relationship with God. After one year of study, I was recommended to study for another year, to which I agreed upon.

Now I can say with all confidence that I am a very happy person. I have the meaning of life, friends, work. There is

no idleness, no dependence. My life is bright and rich, every day of mine is not like the previous one. I know I'm in the right place, in the right position.

Ever since I accepted God, He has fulfilled my desires. For example, in one year I flew six times on an airplane to various conferences and even rested on the Black Sea. I dreamed of a car, prayed, and God answered me. He always gave more than I asked for. I realized how wonderful it is to be with God, to serve Him, and to receive a reward from Him.

Pavel VILISOV, golosboga.ru



I'm many years old and time cannot be turned back. My turbulent youth and much of my aimless life flew by in an instant. I really do not want to remember the past, but nevertheless I will talk about my existence, which can be called a life of tragedy.

At first, like most children, I had a happy, cloudless childhood. When I was three years old, I showed good dancing abilities, and already at the

The world called me their friend

age of eight the performances of my dance group were broadcast on TV. In those years, few people had a TV at home. I remember my mother telling me how neighbors crowded into our little communal apartment to look at me live.

As I got older, choreography classes began to tire me out, as it is not an easy job, and soon the choreography was put to an end. I was a teenager, I wanted to spend time with my friends on the street. The result was not long in coming.

At first, I started smoking, and at the age of sixteen I got into a company where there was everything: drugs, money, restaurants. I was a brash, fearless and risky kid. Friends in the underworld called me *their friend*. Spinning in these circles, I tried drugs.

At first, everything was butterflies and rainbows: a fun life without worries and problems. In this bad frenzy, you do not notice how many beautiful things surround us. The problems started later, when I realized that I had fallen into a swamp that pulls deeper and deeper, to the very bottom, and there is no strength to get out of there.

Years passed. Somewhere my joyful life disappeared, only hatred and anger at myself and the people around me remained.

(Continued on page 8)

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS



(Ending. Beginning
on page 7)

I hadn't been getting the same high from drugs as before, and the doses were growing and growing, demanding a lot of money. Unable to live a single day without them, I was forced to steal to ensure my normal condition. My conscience repeatedly

The world called me their friend

stirred me, trying to stop me, but the circumstances were stronger, and I stepped over its voice.

In the 1980s and 1990s, I was considered one of the best thieves in town. Money came to me very easily. When our valiant police began to show excessive interest in us, then my friend and I went *on tour*, that is, went to steal in those cities where no one knew us, and then when interest in us from law enforcement agencies subsided, we returned to Novosibirsk with good *earnings*.

Yes, I will not hide the fact that I had to visit prisons. In general, I went through the Crimea and Rome, but even there my friends supplied me *with drugs*. However, gradually I came to the realization that without drugs I could not survive, since having used drugs for forty years my body was dependent on drugs. Many times, I tried to get over the sickness, but nothing worked, because the liver and kidneys stopped functioning. The doctors even feared that my heart might not be able to work without drugs. There was no way out of this situation, so I decided not to try my luck and not to try changing anything. *As long as I live, as long as I live*, I resigned myself to this thought.

Many of my friends passed away from drugs, including a friend of mine who left this world in 1991. Now I do not remember how many times I was on the verge of life and death, getting into various criminal situations. All the circumstances said that I had no chance of hoping that life would change for the better.

But one day, a friend appeared on my way who once led almost the same lifestyle as me, but God saved her. It took her a lot of effort to communicate with me, as I avoided meeting her in every possible way, but she took a long and hard time to get hold of me. Her annoyance irritated me, I wanted to send her away. I didn't want to believe in anything, it was hard to convince me of anything. But, oddly enough, she succeeded. Later, she told me that she had been praying for me for more than a year.

When I first heard about God's love for me, my mind didn't want to accept it. How can you love someone whose past is only sin? People like me have always been called the dregs of society, and here it is God gave His Son for my sins. It didn't fit in my head. Now, of course, I regret that I did not know our Lord and Savior sooner. But even now I am grateful to Him for living in my heart.

At the beginning of drug rehabilitation, my sisters from the church helped me a lot: they sincerely worried, prayed and fasted for forty days so that I could more easily endure the liberation from this cursed addiction. During my rehab, I acquired many brothers and sisters in Christ, many of whom used to be drug addicts as well.

My spiritual guides taught me that only God's love can free me from addiction. We just need to respond to God's calling, repent of our sins, and entrust our lives to Him. Throughout my life, it was like someone's invisible hand had kept me alive. I now know that a patient and loving God gives a chance to even the most notorious sinner.

The miracle that God had done to me seemed unreal to me. I was able to return to normal life without the help of doctors. There is no trace of my former life. I will never cease to praise God, who changed my character, my views, and my life priorities. I am happy that He continues to delight me more and more every day. I believe that the best is yet to come!

Natalia YEGOROVA,
golosboga.ru

BEING A ROLE MODEL

Everyone can be considered an expert in any field, whether it is a specialist in rudeness or a master of petting cats. And what we can do ourselves, we unconsciously teach others. How do you become a teacher of good things?

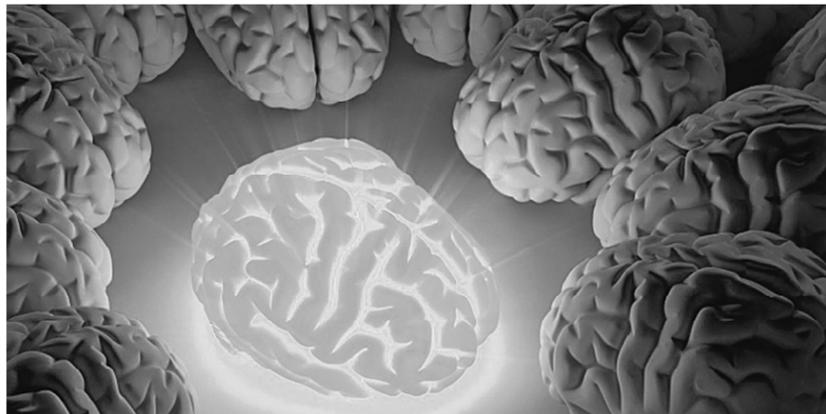
Whether I like it or not, I'm teaching someone something. And it's not about the profession at all. I teach a child to tie shoelaces, I teach a kitten to use a tray, I teach a familiar grandmother to use a new phone, I teach a parrot to talk. But I don't even know the real number of individuals who learn from me, either good or bad. Someone looks at me and learns to cross the road in the wrong place. Another, looking at me, learns to be rude. And the third learns to be grateful. Everything I say and do is seen and perceived by others. If you think about it, an incredible responsibility falls on our shoulders.

Folk wisdom says that a child does not need to be brought up — he will still copy you. This is true for the adults around us, but in a slightly different perspective. I can give as much advice as I want on family relationships, but no one will listen to me if my marriage is bursting at its seams. A complete dietitian and a non-athletic fitness trainer will not be successful without clients. Expertise should be confirmed by the results in one's own life. Thus, if I am rude to sellers — I am an expert in rudeness, you can learn it from me. If I resent the front desk queue, I'm an expert on outrage. If I make claims against everyone, I am an expert in this matter.

I don't want to be an expert in negative behavior, I don't want to be a professor in the department of negative character traits. So, what do you do? Undergo professional retraining!

I found the perfect Master who only did what he taught. And He taught exceptionally good things. I came to this conclusion after studying His biography.

Among the best qualities of teachers in schools are patience and the ability to explain calmly. Let's see if Jesus taught this and applied it in His practical life.



PATIENCE

Jesus says: *By your patience possess your souls (Luke 21:19).*

In practice, He was very patient at a time when soldiers, people, and priests were mocking Him morally and physically. This is a difficult example, not everyone will have such a test. But what about the fact that my parents and friends don't understand me? Jesus had experience in this matter as well. The brothers believed that He had gone mad. But patience led to the fact that their opinion changed, they became His followers.

THE WISE ARE CALM IN EXPLAINING

Jesus says: *...whoever says to his brother, "Raca!" (fool) shall be in danger of the council (Matthew 5:22).*

Imagine that the younger brother asks the same question repeatedly. A sister can't learn to jump-rope no matter how much you show her. How I want to call them various names and doubt their intellectual abilities, and shout at them. Was Jesus able to calmly explain the same truths to the disciples repeatedly, and see how they did not understand Him over and over again? Again and again in the Gospel we see the phrases: *But they understood none of these things; But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them; ...but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.* And Jesus doesn't say, *I'm tired, I won't talk to them anymore, it's a waste of time!* He doesn't yell at them, He's calm, He's with these people all the time, he's speaking, he's teaching, he's instructing. A teacher like Jesus suits me. I want to be like Him, I want to be taught these qualities. There's so much to learn from Jesus.

Nadezhda SELEZNYOVA, <https://proekt7d.ru>

PROVERBS

A GREAT FEAT



One hermit attained such holiness that he lived peacefully among the beasts, and they did not touch him, fed their cubs, and the beasts did not harm him. When one of the monastery fathers saw him, he said:

"If you want to achieve even greater perfection, go to a monastery and try to get along with the holy brothers".

A MAN DRIVING THROUGH A MARKET

One brother complained to an elder that during prayer there are many different thoughts and distractions. The elder replied:

"A man was driving through the farmers market, around him a lot is going on with a crowd of people, lots of talking and noise, and he was on his horse: 'Giddy up, giddy up! Giddy up, giddy up!' And little by little, he drove through it. So, you, no matter what your thoughts say, pray and get through it!"



<https://pritchi.ru>

QUOTES FROM FAMOUS PEOPLE ABOUT GOD AND THE BIBLE

Max BORN,
Distinguished Professor
of Physics, Nobel Prize
winner



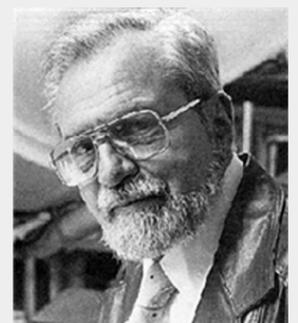
"Science makes many moral and ethical demands on the scientist. If a scientist believes in God, it will alleviate his problem. A scientist must have great patience and humility, and faith can give him these qualities".

John FRIEDRICH,
Chief Chemist of the
U.S. Department
of Agriculture



"Nothing is impossible with God. He performs miracles as opposed to the laws of nature. He has the right and the power to do so, for He is the Creator of the laws. A miracle is not unnatural, but supernatural. I am convinced that man by his own power cannot achieve an improvement in morality. Only Christ can do that. Without Christ, you cannot love God and your neighbor".

Joseph Allen HYNEK,
Director
of the Lindheimer
Astronomical
Research Center
(Illinois, USA)



"I know very few scientists who have told me they are atheists. I know many astronomers who are definitely religious people. They have great respect for the universe and for the One who created it. Faith in God is irrelevant if it is not manifested in a person's daily life".

HOSPITALITY IN BIBLICAL TIMES

Scripture tells us about Abraham, who took travelers into his house. The travelers wanted to pass by this house altogether, but he diligently begged them to stay. After their consent, he chose the best calf and butchered him. After preparing his meals, he stood humbly to the side while the travelers enjoyed their food. He later learned that they were angels. Thanks to this, a blessing came to his house. Finally, his long-awaited son was born. Till this day angels sometimes come in human form, and we can honor them, for which we will be blessed.

Hospitality was an integral part of the life of Israelis. Men in the East believed that guests were sent by God. Therefore, taking care of a good reception was considered a sacred duty. When Abraham received three unusual travelers, his enthusiasm was a manifestation of Eastern hospitality (Gen. 18:2–7). We usually consider friends or acquaintances to be guests. And in the East, guests were divided into three groups: friends, travelers, and enemies.

Jesus, after His baptism in the Jordan, saw two of John's disciples following Him. When He invited them to His house, He treated them for a whole day. And when Jesus called Matthew to the apostleship, the first thing he did was invited Him and all the apostles to his home.

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

on the couch, with their legs tucked under them. Shoes can smear the coating or clothing. This order is associated with the Lord's command to take off one's shoes in a holy place. Near a burning bush, the Lord said to Moses, *...don't come here; take your shoes off your feet, for the place on which you stand is the holy land* (Ex. 3:5).

After bowing, greeting, and kissing, the guests' feet were washed. The servant pours water on the guest's feet over a copper bowl, washing them with his hands and wiping them with a towel. When Jesus was with the disciples, instead of a servant, He washed their feet and asked them to do the same.

In biblical times in the Middle East, a person had his head smeared with oil as a sign of deep respect or hospitality. Typically, flavored olive oil was used for this purpose. In addition, Jews poured oil on the head of those who officially received a special position or were vested with power.

The custom of sending an invitation to the holiday twice is characteristic of some parts of the East. Confirmation of this tradition is contained in the Bible. Sometime before the beginning of the celebration, the first invitation was sent. Later, the servant came again to report that everything was ready. One such example is found in the parable of the dinner party: *Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had*

right hand of the host during the meal. The second most important place was on the left. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for seeking to take the most honorable places when they were invited to the feast.

Entertainment at the festival was dancing. When the prodigal son returned home, he was greeted with music and dance (Lk. 15:24–25). Mostly women and girls danced, although sometimes men danced as well. David danced before the ark of the covenant when he was carried to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:14).

In the East, there is a tradition of breaking, not cutting bread. To cut bread meant destruction. Since Christ broke bread during the Lord's Supper, the expression *breaking bread* began to be used in relation to the sacrament.

An eastern saying goes like this, *Every traveler is a welcome guest*. The Arab Bedouins of our time sit at the entrance to their tent, as Abraham once did, to see a traveler or guest from afar (Gen. 18:1).

An important aspect of oriental hospitality is that the enemy can be accepted as a guest. As long as he remains in this position, he is perfectly safe and treated like a friend. Some tribes of nomads live in such a way that the enemy who dismounted and touched the rope of the tent is safe.

The tradition of anointing guests is very ancient. It was widespread among the peoples of the East. For this purpose, pure olive oil is used, and sometimes spices are added to it.



"Come", he replied, "and you will see". So, they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon (John 1:38–39).

The greetings with which they enter the Arab house or tent of the Bedouin are of great importance. It usually looks like this. The guests say, *Shalom aleichem*, which means *peace be unto you*. To which the host responds with the words: *Waaleichem es-shalom*, that is, *and peace to you*. The greeting is followed by a kiss. The man places his right hand on the left shoulder of the guest and kisses him on the right cheek, and then vice versa. In Scripture, we find that the greeting with a kiss was very common. For example, Jacob kissed his father, Esau kissed Jacob, Joseph kissed his brothers, Aaron kissed Moses, Moses kissed Japhorus, Jonathan and David kissed each other, the father kissed the prodigal son when he returned home.

Before entering the main room of the house, guests take off their shoes. This is necessary, as they sit on mats, bedding or

been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready'" (Lk. 14:16–17).

They feasted in ancient times usually at night in brightly lit rooms. A man who was expelled from the feast was commanded to be thrown out of the consecrated room *into the outer darkness of the night*. In the teachings of Jesus Christ, the day of judgment is like the expulsion from the feast (Matt. 8:12). In the East, the lamp was usually left to burn all night. People were afraid of the dark, so the expression *outer darkness* is most appropriate for depicting the future punishment of the unrighteous.

Chairs were not common in early biblical times. They were available in the royal house or used during some ceremonies. The prophet Amos was the first to mention the tradition of *lying on beds while eating* (Am. 6:4). In Jesus' time, the Romans also reclined on beds while eating.

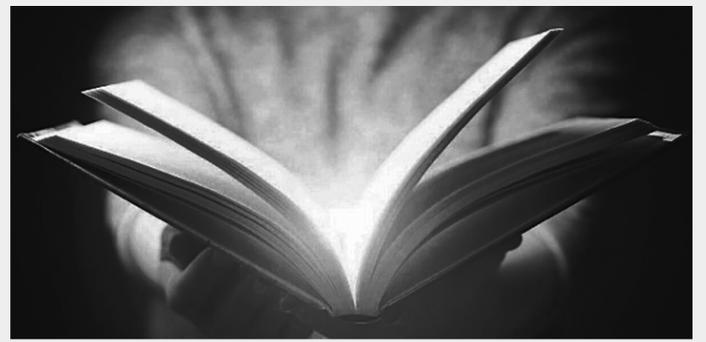
Guests of honor were invited to a room with a higher floor than in the rest of the house. Such a room was designed for special occasions. Guests were honored by sitting them on the

Simon, the Pharisee, did not give Jesus the hospitality he deserved: he did not wash his feet, kiss Him, or anoint His head with oil (Lk. 7:46). David immortalized this tradition by mentioning it in the psalm: *...anointed my head with oil...* (Ps. 22:5).

One of the first drinks offered to a guest was water. This was a sign that a person was considered worthy of a peaceful reception in the house. Serving water is the easiest way to make friends with a person. Jesus speaks of this tradition: *And whoever brings you a cup of water in my name, for you are Christ's, verily I tell you, he will not lose his reward* (Mk. 9:41).

Easterners mention God in everyday conversations. A surprised person often exclaims: *Mashallah!* (Which means *That's what God does!*). This is what Balaam exclaimed many centuries ago (Num. 23:23). When a man talks about his plans, he says, *If it pleases God*, Jacob advised him to do so in his epistle (Jas. 4:15).

<https://bible-facts.org>



Tricky Questions About the Bible

Some consider this book an instruction for life, while others consider it a collection of fairy tales. It is time to figure out what this Bible is, what are the disputes that have not subsided for more than a thousand years.

Is it true that the Bible is unscientific?

Einstein, Newton, Lomonosov, Pascal, Asimov, and many lesser-known scientists read the Bible, wrote about it — and believed it. Yes, this is not a scientific textbook, but some of its questions are beyond the reach of scientific minds. For example, do you love your friend? What is the meaning of life? How can I find life after death?

It is said that the original meaning of the Bible was lost due to many translations and rewrites. Is this true?

There are many copies of the Bible in the original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. And now, as more and more ancient documents are found, scientists are learning more and more about these languages. Thus, the basis of modern translations is a thorough study of the originals.

Could it be that the Bible was changed on purpose?

In fact, manuscripts written two thousand years ago are almost identical to those we read today. Hundreds of ancient copies in different parts of the world are almost identical to each other. For example, the Dead Sea manuscripts, found in 1947 by an Arab shepherd, contain large fragments of the Old Testament confirming that modern translations are strikingly accurate.

Ancient scribes would not have wanted to change what they thought was the Word of God. Census takers followed every letter, syllable, word, and paragraph of the Bible. A whole system of counting and verifying each symbol was developed.

Biblical stories are more like legends.

Is it worth perceiving? Literally?

The main problem of this question is the miracles that the Bible talks about. How did people heal, come back to life, or walk on water? I've never seen that! But shouldn't we perceive with an open mind how miraculously God the Creator can intervene in the natural world and our lives? Yes, it sounds implausible, but who can prove that it is impossible? It would be interesting to read eyewitness accounts who claimed to have seen supernatural deeds, especially if they have not received a penny in their minds for their history and if a huge crowd of people claim to have seen the same thing.

Many biblical authors were threatened and even killed for speaking and writing (for example, when talking about the resurrection of Christ). And yet they remained true to what they wrote. Who wants to die for lying or making up stories? I don't know any people who would agree to die for the truth about Little Red Riding Hood.

What is the Bible?

To answer this question, let's see what is in this book? A set of rules on how to live a completely uninteresting life? Boring saints who do great things? No! Amazing stories about the mistakes and adventures of real people, about the rich and the poor, about the ugly and beautiful, about musicians, slaves, assassins, great leaders... Some of these stories are tragic (mass murder, divorce, betrayal, family breakdown), while others are very sublime or hilarious. But they are all thought-provoking. There are books of laws, songs, witty statements, prophetic visions. The Guinness Book of World Records recognizes that the Bible is the only book that each year outstrips itself in the number of copies sold. Classic? The Bible has been a bestseller since 1454, when it became the first book published.

Why do we need the Bible?

To answer this question simply, in order to save people, to help us find God so that we can go to heaven. You can read the Bible for the sake of interest or for the sake of obtaining information, but also read it as a message of God's love for man.

Maria KOROVINA, <https://proekt7d.ru>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT PRAYER

WHAT IS THE SINNER'S PRAYER?

The sinner's prayer is a prayer a person prays to God when they understand that they are a sinner and in need of a Savior. Saying a sinner's prayer will not accomplish anything on its own. A true sinner's prayer only represents what a person knows, understands, and believes about their sinfulness and need for salvation.

The first aspect of a sinner's prayer is understanding that we are all sinners. **Romans 3:10** proclaims, *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.* The Bible makes it clear that we have all sinned. We are all sinners in need of mercy and forgiveness from God (**Titus 3:5-7**). Because of our sin, we deserve eternal punishment (**Matthew 25:46**). The sinner's prayer is a plea for grace instead of judgment. It is a request for mercy instead of wrath.

The second aspect of a sinner's prayer is knowing what God has done to remedy our lost and sinful condition. God took on flesh and became a human being in the Person of Jesus Christ (**John 1:1, 14**). Jesus taught us the truth about God and lived a perfectly righteous and sinless life (**John 8:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21**). Jesus then died on the cross in our place, taking the punishment that we deserve (**Romans 5:8**). Jesus rose from the dead to prove His victory over sin, death, and hell (**Colossians 2:15; 1 Corinthians chapter 15**). Because of all of this, we can have our sins forgiven and be promised an eternal home in Heaven — if we will just place our faith in Jesus Christ. All we have to do is believe that He died in our place and rose from the dead (**Romans 10:9-10**). We can be saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. **Ephesians 2:8** declares, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*

Saying the sinner's prayer is simply a way of declaring to God that you are relying on Jesus Christ as your Savior. There are no magical words that result in salvation. It is only faith in Jesus' death and resurrection that can save us. If you understand that you are a sinner and in need of salvation through Jesus Christ, here is a sinner's prayer you can pray to God: *God, I know that I am a sinner. I know that I deserve the consequences of my sin. However, I am trusting in Jesus Christ as my Savior. I believe that His death and resurrection provided for my forgiveness. I trust in Jesus and Jesus alone as my personal Lord and Savior. Thank you Lord, for saving me and forgiving me! Amen!*

WHY PRAY?

For the Christian, praying is supposed to be like breathing, easier to do than to not do. We pray for a variety of reasons. For one thing, prayer is a form of serving God (**Luke 2:36-38**) and obeying Him. We pray because God commands us to pray (**Philippians 4:6-7**). Prayer is exemplified for us by Christ and the early church (**Mark 1:35; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:23-31; 6:4; 13:1-3**). If Jesus thought it was worthwhile to pray, we should also.

Another reason to pray is that God intends prayer to be the means of obtaining His solutions in a number of situations. We pray in preparation for major decisions (**Luke 6:12-13**); to overcome demonic barriers (**Matthew 17:14-21**); to gather workers for the spiritual harvest (**Luke 10:2**); to gain strength to overcome temptation (**Matthew 26:41**); and to obtain the means of strengthening others spiritually (**Ephesians 6:18-19**).

We come to God with our specific requests, and we have God's promise that our prayers are not in vain, even if we do not receive specifically what we asked for (**Matthew 6:6; Romans 8:26-27**). He has promised that when we ask for things that are in accordance with His will, He will give us what we ask for (**1 John 5:14-15**). Sometimes He delays His answers according to His wisdom and for our benefit. In these situations, we are to be diligent and persistent in prayer (**Matthew 7:7; Luke 18:1-8**). Prayer should not be seen as our means of getting God to do our will on earth, but rather as a means of getting God's will done on earth. God's wisdom far exceeds our own.

For situations in which we do not know God's will specifically, prayer is a means of discerning His will (see **James 1:5**). Prayer was instrumental in the Spirit's sending of Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (**Acts 13:1-3**). Solomon asked

for wisdom and knowledge, and God gave him that and much more (**2 Chronicles 1:10-12**).

Prayers un-prayed will be prayers unanswered. If the Syrian woman with the demon-influenced daughter had not prayed to Christ, her daughter would not have been made whole (**Mark 7:26-30**). If the blind man outside Jericho had not called out to Christ, he would have remained blind (**Luke 18:35-43**). God has said that we often go without because we do not ask (**James 4:2**). In one sense, prayer is like sharing the gospel with people. We do not know who will respond to the message of the gospel until we share it. In the same way, we will never see the results of answered prayer unless we pray.

A lack of prayer demonstrates a lack of faith and a lack of trust in God's Word. We pray to demonstrate our faith in God, that He will do as He has promised in His Word and bless our lives abundantly more than we could ask or hope for (**Ephesians 3:20**). Prayer is our primary means of seeing God work in others' lives. Because it is our means of plugging into God's power, it is our means of defeating Satan and his army that we are powerless to overcome by ourselves. Therefore, may God find us often before His throne, for we have a high priest in heaven who can identify with all that we go through (**Hebrews 4:15-16**). We have His promise that the fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much (**James 5:16-18**). May God glorify His name in our lives as we believe in Him enough to come to Him often in prayer.

IS CORPORATE PRAYER IMPORTANT?

Corporate prayer is an important part of the life of the church, along with worship, sound doctrine, communion, and fellowship. The early church met regularly to learn the doctrine of the apostles, break bread, and pray together (**Acts 2:42**). When we pray together with other believers, the effects can be very positive. Corporate prayer edifies and unifies us as we share our common faith. The same Holy Spirit who dwells within each believer causes our hearts to rejoice as we hear praises to our Lord and Savior, knitting us together in a unique bond of fellowship found nowhere else in life.

To those who may be alone and struggling with life's burdens, hearing others lift them up to the throne of grace can be a great encouragement. It also builds in us love and concern for others as we intercede for them. At the same time, corporate prayer will only be a reflection of the hearts of the individuals who participate. We are to come to God in humility (**James 4:10**), truth (**Psalms 145:18**), obedience (**1 John 3:21-22**), with thanksgiving (**Philippians 4:6**) and confidence (**Hebrews 4:16**). Sadly, corporate prayer can also become a platform for those whose words are directed not to God, but to their hearers. Jesus warned against such behavior in **Matthew 6:5-8** where He exhorts us not to be showy, long-winded, or hypocritical in our prayers, but to pray secretly in our own rooms in order to avoid the temptation of using prayer hypocritically.

There is nothing in Scripture to suggest that corporate prayers are more powerful than individual prayers in the sense of moving the hand of God. Far too many Christians equate prayer with getting things from God, and group prayer becomes mainly an occasion to recite a list of our wants. Biblical prayers, however, are multi-faceted, encompassing the whole of the desire to enter into conscious and intimate communion with our holy, perfect, and righteous God. That such a God would bend an ear to His creatures causes praise and adoration to pour forth in abundance (**Psalms 27:4; 63:1-8**), produces heartfelt repentance and confession (**Psalms 51;**

Luke 18:9-14), generates an outpouring of gratitude and thanksgiving (**Philippians 4:6; Colossians 1:12**), and creates sincere intercessory pleas on behalf of others (**2 Thessalonians 1:11; 2:16**).

Prayer, then, is cooperating with God to bring about His plan, not trying to bend Him to our will. As we abandon our own desires in submission to the One who knows our circumstances far better than we ever could and who knows what you need before you ask (**Matthew 6:8**), our prayers reach their highest level. Prayers offered in submission to the Divine will, therefore, are always answered positively, whether offered by one person or a thousand.

The idea that corporate prayers are more likely to move the hand of God comes largely from a misinterpretation of **Matthew 18:19-20**, *Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.* These verses come from a larger passage which addresses the procedures to be followed in



the case of church discipline of a sinning member. To interpret them as promising believers a blank check for anything they might agree to ask God for, no matter how sinful or foolish, not only does not fit the context of church discipline, but it denies the rest of Scripture, especially the sovereignty of God.

In addition, to believe that when two or three are gathered to pray, some kind of magical power boost is automatically applied to our prayers is not biblically supportable. Of course Jesus is present when two or three pray, but He is equally present when one believer prays alone, even if that person is separated from others by thousands of miles. Corporate prayer is important because it creates unity (**John 17:22-23**) and is a key aspect of believers' encouraging one another (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**) and spurring one another on to love and good deeds (**Hebrews 10:24**).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PRAY IN JESUS' NAME?

Prayer in Jesus' name is taught in **John 14:13-14**, *And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.* Some misapply this verse, thinking that saying in Jesus' name at the end of a prayer results in God's always granting what is asked for. This is essentially treating the words in Jesus' name as a magic formula. This is absolutely unbiblical.

Praying in Jesus' name means praying with His authority and asking God the Father to act upon our prayers because we come in the name of His Son, Jesus. Praying in Jesus' name means the same thing as praying according to the will of God, *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him* (**1 John 5:14-15**). Praying in Jesus' name is praying for things that will honor and glorify Jesus.

Saying in Jesus' name at the end of a prayer is not a magic formula. If what we ask for or say in prayer is not for God's glory and according to His will, saying in Jesus' name is meaningless. Genuinely praying in

Jesus' name and for His glory is what is important, not attaching certain words to the end of a prayer. It is not the words in the prayer that matter, but the purpose behind the prayer. Praying for things that are in agreement with God's will is the essence of praying in Jesus' name.

HOW CAN I HAVE MY PRAYERS ANSWERED BY GOD?

Many people believe answered prayer is God granting a prayer request that is offered to Him. If a prayer request is not granted, it is understood as an unanswered prayer. However, this is an incorrect understanding of prayer. God answers every prayer that is lifted to Him. Sometimes God answers no or wait. God only promises to grant our prayers when we ask according to His will. *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him* (**1 John 5:14-15**).

What does it mean to pray according to God's will? Praying according to God's will is praying for things that honor and glorify God and/or praying for what the Bible clearly reveals God's will to be. If we pray for something that is not honoring to God or not God's will for our lives, God will not give what we ask for. How can we know what God's will is? God promises to give us wisdom when we ask for it. **James 1:5** proclaims, *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.* A good place to start is **1 Thessalonians 5:12-24**, which outlines many things that are God's will for us. The better we understand God's Word, the better we will know what to pray for (**John 15:7**). The better we know what to pray for, the more often God will answer yes to our requests.

IS IT ACCEPTABLE TO REPEATEDLY PRAY FOR THE SAME THING?

In **Luke 18:1-7**, Jesus uses a parable to illustrate the importance of persevering in prayer. He tells the story of a widow who came to an unjust judge seeking justice against her adversary. Because of her persistence in prayer, the judge relented. Jesus' point is that if an unjust judge will grant the petition of someone who perseveres in a request for justice, how much more will the God who loves us — *his chosen ones* (**v. 7**) — answer our prayer when we keep praying? The parable does not teach, as is mistakenly thought, that if we pray for something over and over, God is obligated to give it to us. Rather, God promises to avenge His own, to vindicate them, right their wrongs, do them justice, and deliver them from their adversaries. He does this because of His justice, His holiness, and His hatred of sin; in answering prayer, He keeps His promises and displays His power.

Jesus gives another illustration of prayer in **Luke 11:5-12**. Similar to the parable of the unjust judge, Jesus' message in this passage is that if a man will inconvenience himself to provide for a needy friend, God will provide for our needs far more, since no request is an inconvenience to Him. Here again, the promise is not that we will receive whatever we ask if we just keep asking. God's promise to His children is a promise to meet our needs, not our wants. And He knows our needs better than we do. The same promise is reiterated in **Matthew 7:7-11** and in **Luke 11:13**, where the good gift is further explained to be the Holy Spirit.

Both of these passages encourage us to pray and to keep praying. There is nothing wrong with repeatedly asking for the same thing. As long as what you are praying for is within the will of God (**James 4:3; 1 John 5:14-15**), keep asking until God grants your request or removes the desire from your heart. Sometimes God forces us to wait for an answer to our prayers in order to teach us patience and perseverance. Sometimes we ask for something when granting it is not yet in God's timing for our lives. Sometimes we ask for something that is not God's will for us, and He says no. Prayer is not only our presenting requests to God; it is God's presenting His will to our hearts. Keep on asking, keep on knocking, and keep on seeking until God grants your request or convinces you that your request is not His will for you.

<http://www.gotquestions.org>

Some Christians have the idea that faith and reason are in conflict, divided by some unbridgeable chasm. They think that one takes over where the other leaves off. In reality, faith and reason work together seamlessly to help us know and love our Maker.

Many Christians perceive a conflict between reason and faith. On the one hand, God tells us to reason (**Isaiah 1:18**). We are to have a good reason for what we believe, and we are to be always ready to share that reason with other people (**1 Peter 3:15**). So, we attempt to show unbelievers that our belief in the Scriptures is reasonable, justified, and logically defensible. The Bible makes sense.

On the other hand, we are supposed to have faith. We are supposed to trust God and not lean on our own understanding (**Proverbs 3:5**). The Bible tells us

For example, when we believe that God will keep a promise, this constitutes faith because we cannot see it and yet we have a good reason for it: God has demonstrated that He keeps His promises.

THE PLACE OF REASON

As many people have misunderstandings of faith, they also have misunderstandings of reason. Reason is a tool that God has given us that allows us to draw conclusions and inferences from other information, such as the information He has given us in His Word. Reason is an essential part of Christianity; God tells us to reason (**Isaiah 1:18**) as the apostle Paul did (**Acts 17:17**).

In fact, I could not know that I am saved apart from using reason. After all, the Bible nowhere says

have faith that there are laws of logic which correctly prescribe the correct chain of reasoning. Since laws of logic cannot be observed with the senses, our confidence in them is a type of faith.

For the Christian, it is a reasonable, justified faith. The Christian would expect to find a standard of reasoning that reflects the thinking of the biblical God; that's what laws of logic are. On the other hand, the unbeliever cannot account for laws of logic with his or her own worldview.

Since laws of logic are necessary for reasoning, and since the Christian faith is the only faith system that can make sense of them it follows that the Christian faith is the logical foundation for all reasoning (**Proverbs 1:7; Colossians 2:3**). This isn't to say, of course, that non-Christians cannot reason. Rather, it simply means they are being inconsistent when they reason; they are borrowing from a worldview contrary to the one they profess.

Since reason would be impossible without laws of logic, which stem from the Christian faith, we have a particularly good reason for our faith: without our faith we could not reason. Even unbelievers (inconsistently) rely upon Christian principles, such as logic, whenever they reason about anything. So, the Christian has a good reason for his or her faith. In fact, the Christian faith system makes reason possible.

CAN WE REASON SOMEONE TO HEAVEN?

Although reasoning from the Scriptures is an important part of the Christian's life, reason alone is not sufficient to lead us to Christ.

After the fall of Adam, human beings no longer possessed the ability to correctly understand spiritual matters (**1 Corinthians 2:14**). It is our nature to distort the truth (**2 Peter 3:16**). So, we need the help of the Holy Spirit even to understand and accept the fact that Jesus is Lord (**1 Corinthians 12:3**).

This explains why it is impossible to reason someone into heaven. Salvation is accomplished by God's grace received through faith in Christ alone (**Ephesians 2:8; Romans 3:24; Titus 3:5**). It is ultimately the Holy Spirit who convinces people and enables them to receive Christ (**John 16:8-15**).

Some may ask, *why then should we do apologetics? Why should we try to reason with people if it is the Holy Spirit who will ultimately convince them?*

There are two reasons.

First, God tells us to. We are to be ready at all times to give a good reason for our faith (**1 Peter 3:15**). So, it is our duty as followers of Christ to preach the gospel (**2 Timothy 4:2**) and reason with unbelievers (**Acts 17:17**).

Second, God can bless our discussions with unbelievers and use them as part of the process by which He brings people to Himself (**Romans 10:13-14**). Although salvation is accomplished by Christ alone, God has given us the privilege of telling others about this good news and making a reasoned defense of it.

Reasoning is a crucial part of defending the faith. But we must always keep in mind that conversion is up to God alone. It is not our job to convince the unbeliever — nor can we. It is our job to make a good case; it is the Holy Spirit's prerogative alone to bring repentance.

One Christian may plant a seed, and another water it, but God alone brings the increase (**1 Corinthians 3:6-7**).

Dr. Jason LISLE,

www.AnswersinGenesis.org

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P. S. Dr. Jason Lisle is a Christian astrophysicist who researches issues pertaining to science and the Christian faith. Lisle earned a PhD in astrophysics at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Dr. Lisle has worked at Answers in Genesis, the Institute for Creation Research, and is the Founder of the Biblical Science Institute.

FAITH vs REASON

that the *just shall live by faith* (**Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11**). It seems that we are supposed to trust God regardless of whether His words make sense to our understanding.

So, which is it? Are we to live by reason or by faith? Are we supposed to rely upon our intellect, drawing rational conclusions, rejecting those things that don't make sense? Or are we to accept the teachings of Scripture without regard to logic and reason, even if it does not make any sense?

This apparent conflict troubles many people. But it stems from a critical misconception about the meaning of both faith and reason. When both terms are properly defined in their biblical context, any apparent conflict disappears. Yes, we are to have good reasons for what we believe, and we are also to have faith. In fact, without the latter, we could not have the former.

MISCONCEPTIONS OF FAITH

Mark Twain once defined faith as *believing what you know isn't so*. Perhaps this is what many people have in mind when they think of the word faith. Indeed some people seem to pride themselves in their belief in the irrational — thinking that such faith is very pious. *Why do I believe in the Bible? Well, I guess I just have faith.*

But is this what the Bible means when it uses the word faith? Not at all. The Bible does not promote a belief in the irrational or any type of unwarranted blind faith.

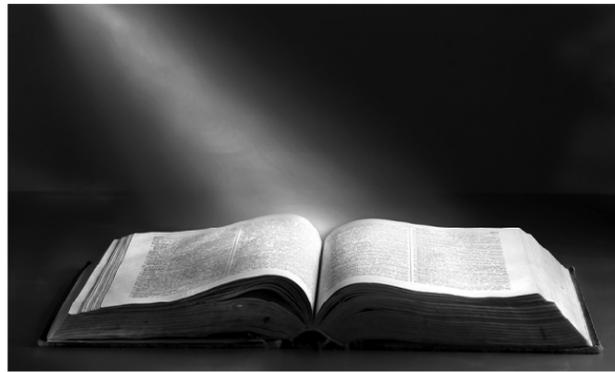
Some people have said, *Faith takes over where reason leaves off*. Taken this way, rationality is seen as a bridge that reaches only partway across a great chasm; faith is needed to complete the bridge and reach the other side.

People who take this view would say that Christianity cannot be proven, that reason leads us most of the way to God and then we must make a *leap of faith* in order to say that Jesus is Lord. This is a very common view among Christians. But this is not what God's Word teaches about faith.

BIBLICAL FAITH

The Bible itself tells us what faith is. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. So biblical faith is not blind but is strongly warranted confidence. The phrase *hoped for* does not imply a mere wishful thinking as in *I sure hope the weather is nice next week*. Rather, the Greek word (*ἐπιζῶ*) indicates a confident expectation: the kind of confidence we have when we have a good reason to believe something.

Biblically, faith is having confidence in something you have not experienced with your senses. Biblical faith is not *blind*; it's not the act of *believing without a reason*. Just the opposite; biblical faith is the act of believing in something unseen for which we do have a good reason.



that *Dr. Lisle is saved*. Instead it tells me that *if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved* (**Romans 10:9**). I have genuinely acknowledged that Jesus is Lord, and I believe that God raised Him from the dead. Therefore, I am saved. I must use logical reasoning to draw this conclusion.

This is perfectly appropriate and is the kind of reasoning God expects us to use. We are to reason from the principles of God's Word.

People misuse reason when they frame their worldview apart from God's Word. This can involve either treating reason as its own ultimate standard (in other words, a replacement for God's Word) or tossing it aside as irrelevant to faith.

Neither of these positions is biblical. We are never to attempt to reason in opposition to the Word of God. That is to say we are not to treat God's Word as a mere hypothesis that is subject to our fallible understanding of the universe.

This, after all, was Eve's mistake. She attempted to use her mind and senses to judge God's Word (**Genesis 3:6**). This was sinful and irrational; she was trying to use a fallible standard to judge an infallible one.

We are never to reason in such an absurd, sinful way. Instead, we are supposed to reason from God's Word, taking it as our ultimate unquestionable starting point. Any alternative is arbitrary and self-refuting. Reason is not a substitute for God; rather, it is a gift from God.

On the other hand, we are not to reject reason. God is rational, and so we should be, too (**Ephesians 5:1**). We are commanded to seek wisdom and understanding (**Proverbs 4:5, 7**). God wants us to use the mind He has given us. But He wants us to use our minds properly, in a way that is honoring to Him.

FAITH IS NECESSARY FOR REASON

Biblical faith and biblical reasoning actually work very well together. In fact, faith is a prerequisite for reason. In order to reason about anything we must

CHRISTIAN In Australia, believers with the help of free ice cream, attract new people to church

By handing out free ice cream, members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Melbourne attracted more than three hundred new people in the first four months, according to the *Adventist Review*.

The team's handmade ice cream was distributed at the church's *weExplore* Mission Center, located in the suburbs of Clayton. Recipients were asked to fill out a survey before receiving ice cream, which gave church members the opportunity to meet these people and introduce them to the various programs held at the center.

The church offers activities such as nature walks, cooking classes, *The Future CEO Project*, and the Psychological Sustainability Program.

About forty people came to our program of psychological sustaina-

bility, explained church pastor Chris Go. *It was held online via Zoom, and recently we held a graduation party for them.*

In addition to these initiatives, the church held an Easter camp, in which three of the new acquaintances participated, and organized care groups, which were joined by more than eleven new contacts. Five are now studying the Bible.

Through an ice cream offering event, a student from Monash University joined *The CEO's Future Project* and attended the Psychological Resilience Program. After a few sessions in the program, his interest in Bible knowledge increased and he began to ask more spiritual questions. He is now engaged in personal Bible study.



The church, which began as a campus ministry, now has sixty to eighty regular visitors to Saturday services and continues to grow rapidly thanks to their creative initiatives.

"Gateway" used to be a church on campus, and we did everything on the university campus, Guo said. I came to faith as an international student. Then I was baptized, became a Bible worker, went to Andrews University (in the U.S.), and then came here to serve. Now the church is in a transitional phase, and we're learning how to reach out to the community, trying different things.

<https://bog.news>

Psalm 91 Interesting facts

The ninety first psalm from the Book of Psalms is known by the first words *Qui habitat (in adjutorio Altissimi)* (Latin) and is often used as a prayer in a dangerous situation.

In the Hebrew text of the Bible, the psalm has no title, in the Septuagint it has the inscription *Ἄνος ᾠδῆς τῆ Δαυὶδ* (*David's song of praise*), which was transferred to other translations. The indication of the authorship of the psalm in the Septuagint is the result of a later inscription that could be made by translators. Initially, this document was known in Hebrew, then, thanks to a translation from Hebrew, there was a Greek version (Septuagint), a Latin version (Vulgate), a Russian version (synodal translation), Church Slavonic and English (King James Bible).

Although no author is mentioned in this psalm, Jewish tradition attributes it to Moses. Jewish tradition names Moses as the author of the psalm because it considers this psalm a semantic continuation of the previous, eighty-ninth, where the authorship of Moses is indicated in the inscription.

The main theme of the psalm is God is a reliable refuge for all those who trust in Him. Unlike other psalms, it has a complex construction. The main compositional feature is a dialogue, a rapid change of persons expressing their thoughts and feelings. The psalm is built in the form of an appeal from a mentor who, in his speech directed to the student, expresses confidence in the safety of a person trusting in God and being in communion with Him.

The ninety-first psalm can be divided into two parts:

- ☉ verses 1–8 is various expressions of hope in the Highest,
- ☉ verses 9–16 is a response to the blessings of God.

In Judaism, the edict is recited seven times during funerals, recited at the bedside of the dying, recited daily in prayer before going to bed and is included in the morning prayer of the Sabbath.

The words of the ninety first psalm were quoted by the devil during the temptation of Jesus Christ, when he put Him on the roof of the Temple in Jerusalem and offered to throw himself down: *Then the devil takes Him to the holy city and puts Him on the wing of the temple, and says to Him: If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written: "To his angels he knows about You, and they will carry You in their arms, that thou shalt not stumble upon a stone with their foot". Jesus said to him, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God"* (**Matt. 4:5–7** and **Luke 4:9–12**).

The fact that the ninety first psalm is used during the rite of exorcism (when exorcising and possessing a demon in a person) testifies to the power of prayer. Since the sixth century AD, this psalm has been recited, casting out demons and evil spirits.

The text of the ninety first psalm is often placed on everyday objects to give them the properties of a protective talisman or a hedgehog. However, the Christian Church does not approve of this custom.

Modern Christians see the psalm as a source of comfort and protection in times of suffering. As a psalm of protection, it is usually used in times of difficulty or before embarking on a journey.

People read the ninetieth psalm in deep sorrow and terrible danger. They are calmed because the words of the prayer remind them that God will protect them from all troubles. May the words of this psalm not only come from our lips, but also find places in our hearts as a memory of the infinite love and care of the Lord! God cares especially for those who have come to know Him.

<https://bible-facts.org>

In the Congo, missionaries of the Augustinian Order (the unofficial name of members of several monastic orders and congregations of the Catholic Church) are engaged in the education of orphans, and children raised by the streets. In the country, according to some estimates, there are up to thirty thousand children from eight to fifteen years old that are orphans or children rejected by their parents and forty percent of them are girls, according to *Fides*.

The problem of child orphans and outcasts is very complex, especially in the province of Haut-Ouele, the north-east of the country, where a long-term conflict has led to the devastation of local communities,



In Congo, missionaries educate orphans and homeless

Father Georges Misingi, head of the vicariate of the Order of the Augustinians in the Congo, said in an interview with *Fides*, speaking about a project for the treatment and social reintegration of vulnerable children. *The children are ones who lost their parents, they dropped out of school and their lives were destroyed. It is for this reason that our project for the reintegration of children is primarily designed to help these kinds of children. More broadly, we are helping the most disadvantaged children, who have suffered from the direct and indirect consequences of war, who have been mentally and physically crippled, and who have witnessed terrible violence in their communities.*

In recent years, the people of Dungu have been the victims of constant attacks by the group called Lord's Resistance Army. It is a Ugandan nationalist rebel group that recruits soldiers mostly from the Acholi people (also seen as a destructive sect). Under the leadership of its leader Joseph Kony, this army creates lawlessness, robs and rapes innocent civilians, kidnaps children, zombifies them with their ideology, teaches military crafts, arms and sends them to *holy war*. It is estimated that in this region of the country, this group has recruited about thirty thousand children as soldiers, and many of them are still fighting in various formations of this army. Most of these unfortunate children are between eight and fifteen years old, and forty percent of them are girls.

Some of the children, says Father Georges, are fighting in this army voluntarily, because they have been deceived and pumped up with a misanthropic ideology, while others are avenging the murdered and crippled relatives and friends. In our project, we involve local communities in the education, re-education, and protection of children.

Together with the Congolese Augustinian monks, the international foundation *fondazione Agostiniani nel Mondo* also participates in this project. Work on the project began with the first study in February 2020, after which a building was built where

about a hundred children now live. The educational programs of Christian missionaries and philanthropists of the foundation cover about a thousand young people a year.

In general, children enter our services in a terrible physical and psychological condition, often very sick, says Maurizio Misitiano, executive director of the foundation. Most of them have their legs crippled by long military marches through forests and savannahs without shoes. Many are wounded, others have their health and development undermined by prolonged dehydration and malnutrition. During hostilities in armed groups, they are very poorly fed, they rarely get normal drinking water, they are treated cruelly and inhumanely, with their fragile immune systems they are subject to military drills, all of them suffer not only from physical but also from psychological trauma, and many of them are diagnosed with cognitive and communicative disorders.

First, we conduct their treatment and physical rehabilitation, and then we send them to a special center for social rehabilitation, the missionary explains. Professional psychologists play an important role there, and with their kind attention and constant help, children go through the process of recovery and social rehabilitation. In addition to normal nutrition, rest and treatment, the center's employees teach them carpentry craft courses, information technology and many other skills. We soon plan to open a farm to teach children the basics of animal breeding, so that they can raise cattle and pigs, as well as feed fish in ponds and cages. In addition, the center guarantees every young man and girl a successful resumption of schooling, reintegration into society and mastery of their working profession. The light we offer them includes their adoption programs. We help many refugee families by placing them in temporary housing, and are provided everything necessary to create healthy full-fledged families, to raise and protect these unfortunate children.

<https://bog.news>

ATTENTION!

Dear readers, today the newspaper "Prisoner" has the status of the three languages: Russian, Ukrainian and English. "Prisoner" is printed in the Ukraine and in America. However, it is published and distributed exclusively by voluntary donations. For all those wishing to contribute to the success of "Prisoner" all the requisites are indicated in the last column of the newspaper. For those in America who wish to donate to the newspaper "Prisoner" and support the prison ministry, there is a tear off form, where you can donate and specify what you want the donation to go for. God bless you!

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And for those of you just on the way to God, it's time to turn to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with a short prayer:

"Lord Jesus, I believe you are God's Son; You died for my sins and rose again for my salvation. I accept you as my personal Lord and Savior. Please forgive all my sins and grant me eternal life. Amen!"



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Our contacts:

redakciya.uznik@yahoo.com
tel.: +380645225707
+380661395801

Mailing address in U.S. for the newspaper "Prisoner":

Hope of Freedom, P.O. Box 4053 Everett, WA 98204

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Translation services

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