

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

By the River (p.3)

Does Belief in God Make Sense? (p.5)

Become Someone New (p.13)

A monthly magazine written and published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God’s inspired message to mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God’s world-wide Kingdom.

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By the River

The front cover picture shows an idyllic scene, the river Anker as it flows through Nuneaton in Warwickshire, UK. Rivers are a place of life, where plants grow, fish swim and animals come to drink and feed. It makes them a pleasant place to pass the time and meditate.

For the Jews in exile some 600 years before Jesus, this meditation was a painful one:

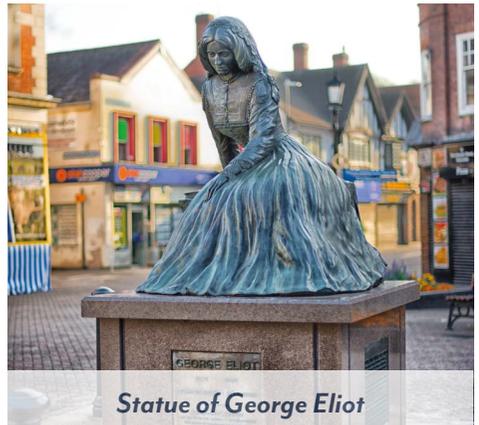
By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, and those who plundered us requested mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? (Psalm 137:1-4).

Popularised History

You may know this from the popular song from the 1970s, but it reflects real suffering. This was part of God's punishment on the Jews for disobedience, but it would be resolved as He works out His long-term plan with them.

Mary Anne Evans, born in Nuneaton, is better known to most by her pen-name, George Eliot. She wrote some highly respected novels as *Middlemarch*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*, which explore some difficult and sensitive parts of the human experience.

The idealistic hero of *Daniel Deronda*, published in 1876, is a young aristocratic gentleman who rescues a young Jewess and reunites her with her family. This was



controversial at the time of publication, as the secular Zionist movement was in its infancy and it became politically divisive within the UK. Politicians around the world were wrestling with the Jewish problem: they had no homeland and experienced severe hardship as they moved from nation to nation trying and largely failing to assimilate.

Believe it or not, this episode which George Eliot paints in fictional writing was actually part of God's fulfilment of the ancient Biblical promises of restoration for the Jewish people.

Bible History

An amazing feature of the Bible is that it foretells what will happen, even thousands of years in advance. When we see that history happen exactly as promised, we conclude that God is in control.

Some 3500 years ago, Moses spoke to the Jews and told them that, if they disobeyed God, they would suffer:

Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other... And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life (Deuteronomy 28:64–66).

The Jews were indeed scattered across the world. The exile in Babylon ended after 70 years and they returned to their land, but in 70 AD and 135 AD the Romans expelled them from Israel. They didn't belong anywhere, but never lost their identity.

Yet God had promised that He would never destroy them completely:

Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you (Jeremiah 30:11).

The Bible also predicted that Israel (the Jewish nation) would come back into being, in their own land. God said:

I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been

scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel (Ezekiel 11:17).

This came true in 1948 when the State of Israel was established. In human terms, it was the movement which George Eliot had written about. But God had been controlling events from the beginning.

The Bible Future

George Eliot was a very successful and talented author, but she could not and did not predict the future.

That's where the Bible is totally different to any other writings. It is God's message revealed to humankind so that we can understand His purpose for the world and the men and women upon it.

The Bible has been correct in its past predictions and we can rely on it being accurate about the future. Jerusalem is set to be the capital of the world when Jesus returns to the earth in great power and glory.

The mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2–3).

That future can be our future!

Does Belief in God Make Sense?

IN this short piece, we are going to think about one of the arguments for the existence of God. The argument is about the fine tuning of the universe and relies on the work of experts found in physics departments or observatories.

We should be very clear: this argument doesn't prove that God exists, or that the God in question is the God of Christianity. What this argument does however, and it does it very well, is to make us think rationally about why the universe is the way it is – and what may have caused it to be so.

We'll briefly think about the evidence, draw some conclusions, and then finish with a question.

The Evidence

Physicists have observed that the laws and forces of nature (such as gravity), the constants of physics (such as the speed of light), and the initial conditions of the universe are finely tuned for life to exist.

One scientist, Robin Collins (2012), commented that, “The laws of nature, the constants of physics, and the initial conditions of the universe must be set to an enormous degree of precision for ... us to exist”. Freeman Dyson (1988), another



physicist, wrote that it appears the universe “knew we were coming”.

To illustrate this principle of fine tuning, Paul Davies (2007) refers to the strength of gravity. If the strength of gravity changed by a mere one part in 1040 (that's 1 part in 1 with 40 zeros after it – a tiny fraction) then stars like the sun would not exist, neither would any form of life. It rests on a knife edge.

The fine tuning of gravity seems impressive, but the force of the argument is that this same level of tuning is found in a whole series of areas. It's not like there is just one factor which is finely tuned, there is a whole series and they are all interlinked.

Alvin Plantinga (2007) summarises that "it's as if there are a large number of dials that have to be tuned to within extremely narrow limits for life to be possible in our universe". It is, in the very least, a big coincidence. And as Agatha Christie's Miss Marple would say, "any coincidence is always worth noting".

Conclusions

This leads us to think about what conclusions we can draw from the evidence. In this highly tuned universe, we need to think through a satisfactory explanation as to why this is the case.

Philosophers and scientists have often pondered this topic and come up with a series of possible explanations. Some have suggested that it is because there are many, many universes (often called the multiverse) and one of them has happened to be just right. Others have even suggested that extra-universal aliens created things to be that way.

Some, however, are confident that a divine mind must be behind this. Antony Flew was once a prominent atheist philosopher who changed his mind and came to believe in a God. He concluded: "multiverse or not, we still have to come to terms with the origins

of the laws of nature... and the only viable explanation is the divine mind".

I think Flew is onto something. We live in a universe that must have been brought into being by something immaterial and eternal, something bigger than and outside the constraints of space and time.

With this in mind, it seems reasonable to me, to think that a divine being, powerful enough to create the universe must be behind this. For me, God is the most rational explanation for the fine tuning of the universe. It makes sense of all those 'dials' being so finely tuned.

The argument points us to the plausibility of God, a divine mind who has finely tuned the universe to permit life. It also seems logical that He would be keen to develop a relationship with His creation.

The Question

If God is a plausible explanation for the fine tuning of the universe, how can we understand the identity of this God? And how do we get to know more about Him?

At this point we move away from physics and astronomy and move into the realms of historical record.

The Bible helps us get to know God. And history bears it out, especially the evidence of an empty tomb in Jerusalem in AD 30 – see the article about the resurrection of Jesus.

Jon Davies

We All Want to Belong

As human beings we are driven by certain basic needs. Our moment-by-moment decisions are often driven by sub-conscious 'programming' to meet our physiological and psychological needs. The 'need to belong' is one of these, second only to our most fundamental requirements for food and physical safety.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow wrote a famous paper in 1943 on "A Theory of Human Motivation". In it, he described a hierarchy of human needs, a sort of pyramid with the most basic at the base and those things that lead to greater fulfilment at the pinnacle.

At the very bottom are our needs for food, water, warmth and rest; the next level is our physical security and safety. Maslow's theory is that we will seek to fulfil our needs in order from bottom to top. Based on this, once we have physical sustenance and safety, the very next urge which will drive our behaviour is the need for meaningful relationships – the need to belong.



This drive leads us to grow and nurture extended families, to form deep, long-lasting friendships and to co-operate with others on a common cause or objective. In more recent times social media tools have dramatically changed the way we connect with people, sometimes for the better. But much has been said about how they can also become an obsession as our drive to belong and be accepted fuels a desire for a multitude of virtual 'friends', 'followers' or 'likes'. We get a little dopamine hit (the feel-good brain chemical) every time we receive a text, a friend request or a like, and it's a highly addictive experience!

The Problem with Social Groups

Whilst our need to belong can be expressed in hugely positive ways, it comes with side effects. We are imperfect human beings living in an imperfect world and the human need to belong can manifest itself in destructive ways. Despite their positive features, many argue that social media organisations are cynically exploiting one of our most basic desires to make money.

That is the heart of the issue. Wherever there is a basic human need, there will be people looking to exploit it to exercise control over others. Wherever people are searching for a place they can be accepted, there will be others providing places to fulfil that need and through it exercise control.

While group or society membership might bring structure to achieving an objective, there can often be a ‘dark side’ with plots for control over ‘the Group’. Rules define whether you are in or out, and those outside ‘the Group’ are portrayed as the enemy. This is true of political, social, national and perhaps especially of religious movements. Through human history their worst expressions lead to terrible violence in the name of ‘the Group’.

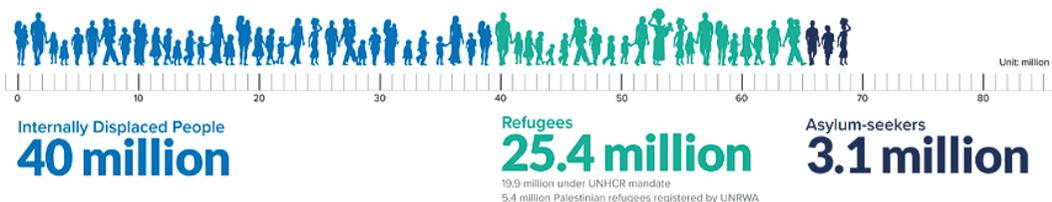
There is ample evidence of this in our modern world. Last year it was estimated

people? Well, we certainly should do our bit, but it still just feels like a drop in the ocean of resisting the destructive tendencies at work in humanity.

This brings us to consider Jesus, what can he bring to the issue?

Well, perhaps surprisingly given the destruction wreaked through history, supposedly in his name, he suggests that we focus on personal relationships. He recognised the big issue with human nature and offered a way forward.

68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide



that a staggering 68.5 million people worldwide have been forcibly displaced. 57% of refugees are from three countries torn by national, religious or ethnic conflict; South Sudan, Afghanistan and Syria. The numbers tell a story of the human cost, but each one of the 68.5 million is an individual with their own personal story of tragedy.

Turning Things Upside Down

What can people like you and me do about this? Can we change the way the world deals with displaced and distressed

You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:42–45).

Jesus turned things upside down by urging us to focus on serving one another in genuine personal relationships, rather than

trying to beat the world at its own game. Jesus himself came ‘not to be served, but to serve’ and he demonstrated this by reaching out whenever he could to the marginalised in his society; the poor, the sick and the lost.

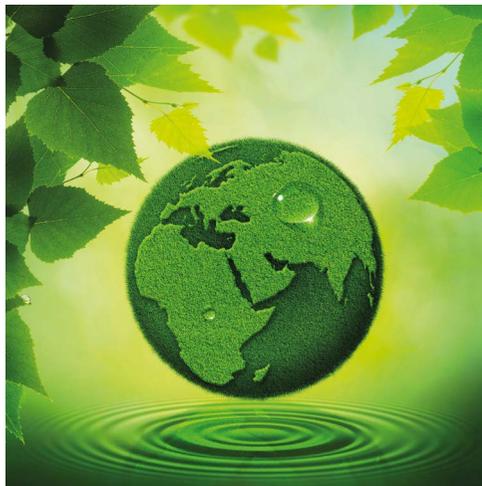
But as well as giving practical help, if people recognised Jesus as the Son of God, he gave them forgiveness for their failings and compassionate acceptance into a relationship with God, his Father. He offered the vulnerable in society a most positive place to belong as part of a community of people aiming to live by that principle of serving one another.

Belonging to Jesus

The call of Jesus is just as meaningful today. It means to reject the prevailing vision of what it means to belong, based on individual achievement, status, wealth and power. It means instead to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, to live like him, to serve and to forgive, and to accept and be accepted. Strange as it may sound, it’s a call to live like “*strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (Hebrews 11:13).

This means rejecting the way of the world, doing what positive good we can, but looking forward to a different kind of society, “...*which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (v10).

This is what Jesus calls the Kingdom of God and is the ultimate solution to humanity’s problems. When this time comes, Jesus will be king of the earth, ruling for God.



With those who belong to him, he will transform the earth from its ugliness and corruption to a place of justice, peace and fair distribution of precious resources to all who need them. Imagine belonging with Jesus at that time and being empowered to do those things!

Read the rest of this edition of *Glad Tidings* to see why it is rational to believe there is a God with a purpose who is interested in right and wrong, and how people become stronger through their faith. That ‘journey of faith’ is completed by belonging to Jesus, serving others now but looking forward with hope to a new age, to fixing the big problems of the world with Jesus.

This is the fulfilment of God’s purpose with the earth, and it’s the power of the Gospel message for salvation to everyone who believes.

Paul Davenport

I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus

I THINK I'm a rational person, as do most people. But I'm telling you that I believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Am I a credulous and gullible believer in fairy tales? Have I been touched by a supernatural experience which revealed to me something hidden from everyone else? I'm neither of those things, and I'd like to share the extraordinary evidence available to support such a belief.

When I say, "I believe", what I mean is that I have considered a body of evidence and concluded that one conclusion provides the best explanation. It's not blind faith.

Considering the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is a little like examining the scene of a crime. We can sift through the objects in the room, observe what the suspects did after the crime was committed, take statements from witnesses and try to piece together what happened. But we can never actually see what happened. It's the same with the resurrection: we can't see exactly what happened, but we can examine artefacts from the time, assess eye witness sources and observe what people did. We can take that evidence and attempt to piece together what happened.

The Existence of Jesus

There are very few people who would

deny that the man Jesus actually lived and died by crucifixion. The New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman wrote: "What can we say in conclusion about the evidence that supports the view that there really was a historical Jesus, a Jewish teacher who lived in Palestine as an adult in the 20s of the Common Era, crucified under Pontius Pilate sometime around the year 30? The evidence is abundant and varied. Among the Gospels we have numerous independent accounts that attest to Jesus's life, at least seven of them from within a hundred years of the traditional date of his death."

There is outstandingly good evidence for Jesus' life and execution. This is unexpected, as Jesus was a largely ignored Jewish preacher in a backwater of the Roman Empire who never travelled more than 100 miles from his birthplace.

But I believe more than just that Jesus lived and died, so I need to offer you more evidence.

People's Behaviour

Just as a detective would observe the way the suspects behave after a crime has been committed, we can also look at how the people around Jesus behaved after he died. When we do, we find another extraordinary

piece of evidence, or more accurately, a combination of three pieces of evidence.

There are three points recognised by the majority of scholars of the period as being strongly evidenced historical events, but the extraordinary feature about them is how they link together. In combination they create a thorny puzzle which defies all obvious explanations.

The three events are as follows:

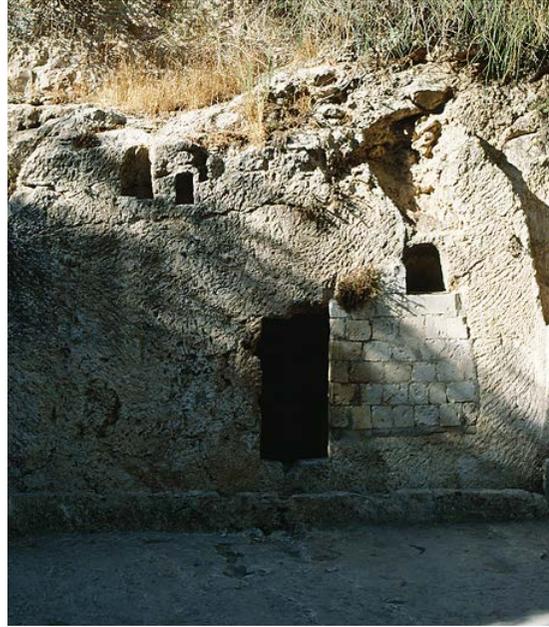
1. The body of Jesus went missing from the tomb and was never produced,
2. The followers of Jesus claimed that they had seen him alive again and were re-energised to great activity a few days after he died,
3. Those that claimed to have seen Jesus alive again were persecuted, and many of them were killed for saying it.

Explaining that Behaviour

The most obvious explanations for these three points just don't seem to fully make sense of them.

Imagine the disciples of Jesus stole the body and then pretended he was alive again. Does that explain all the facts? Well it explains the empty tomb and the claims of the disciples, but does it explain their willingness to die for it? Liars do not make very good martyrs. People do not suffer and die for what they KNOW to be untrue.

Try another explanation. Perhaps the disciples were so stricken with grief that



in their traumatised state they imagined that they saw him alive again. There are serious problems with this idea. Multiple group hallucinations are unheard of, and this would have involved over 500 people. Jesus' body would still have been in the tomb and could easily have been retrieved for the disciples' claims to be refuted. There were plenty of Jewish and Roman leaders in Jerusalem who would have wanted to do just that, and there is no hint in any historical source that they did.

You might imagine that Jesus did not actually die on the cross but revived in the tomb. This ignores the renowned efficiency of Roman soldiers in executing people. Also his disciples would still have been promoting a lie and people don't die for something they know is untrue.

Other theories have been proposed, but none explains all the facts – except that Jesus really did rise from the dead.

The Dramatic Growth of Christianity

For most of human history the growth and adoption of a genuinely new idea took a long time. But in just a few years following the death of Jesus a crystal-clear set of new beliefs and practices burst onto the scene which have reverberated through human history ever since.

Firstly, they included a unique understanding of resurrection. No one in the Jewish or Greek intellectual world was talking about the idea of one person being resurrected, right now, in the middle of history. Jesus' followers preached the idea of resurrection and it grew dramatically.

Secondly, they declared a belief that this Jesus, who everyone knew had been crucified like a criminal, was the Messiah, the Christ. Out of nowhere, they defined an utterly new notion of what it meant to be Messiah; not a military leader freeing people from oppression but a servant, willing to give every part of himself for others.

Alongside these new beliefs emerged new practices: baptism as a symbol of death and resurrection, sharing bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus, and meeting together on the first day of the week for worship of God and in praise of Jesus. These were founded on the personal resurrection

of Jesus and they all suddenly appeared as radical new practices. They cannot even be seen as evolving from Judaism given that they involve eating symbols of flesh and blood and rejecting the observation of the Sabbath – two things which strike at the very core of Judaism.

Such radical new ideas emerging so quickly, acquiring consistent clarity and then taking root and spreading, demand an explanation. The actual resurrection of Jesus offers the only and best explanation.

The Only Plausible Conclusion

There is other evidence, such as opponents to Christianity who converted to it. The points described here already represent a significant body of evidence from multiple sources. They defy any explanation but this: Jesus rose from the dead.

So where does this leave us? If you already believe there is a God, then perhaps you can be encouraged to see that the bodily resurrection of Jesus is absolutely consistent with the historical evidence.

If you're not sure about the existence of God, then please consider the evidence shared here. The bodily resurrection of Jesus is the rational explanation for the facts surrounding his death and the time afterwards. If Jesus rose from the dead, then we have powerful evidence for the existence of God

**Dan Weatherall
Paul Davenport**

Become Someone New

THERE is very strong evidence for believing in a God who cares about the world He has created. What if, after looking at all this evidence, we are convinced about the truth of the gospel message? What then?

From Caterpillars to Butterflies

Some years ago, our eldest daughter was given a butterfly kit for her birthday. The transformation that a caterpillar

mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:2).

The New Testament was originally written in Greek and the word *transformed* here in Greek is *metamorphoo* from where we get our English word *metamorphosis*, meaning a fundamental, visible and relatively quick change. Paul is effectively saying we should be changing from caterpillars to butterflies!



undergoes to become a butterfly is truly remarkable. Caterpillars are beautiful creatures in their own way, but compared to the beauty, elegance and grace of a butterfly, they pale into insignificance!

The apostle Paul uses this analogy to describe believers in Jesus:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your

We should not just be copying what everyone else is doing (what Paul describes as 'the world') but rather transforming our minds to follow the example of Jesus, who followed God's will perfectly.

From Slavery to Freedom

Let's look at another analogy that Paul uses in Romans:

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? (Romans 6:16).

Paul describes us as 'slaves' to sin. The Bible defines sin as choosing to follow our own desires, rather God's values. Our human nature can get the better of us and we do things that are against God's ways and are hurtful to others. When we allow this to happen, sin becomes our master.

Paul is very clear about the outcome of making sin our master – it leads to death. This seems pretty bleak! Yet he continues:

God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you become slaves of righteousness (v17–18).

Belief in God can transform us and set us free from sin. The verse above sounds as like swapping one form of slavery for another! But Paul concludes:

Now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life (v22).

This 'slavery' will lead to everlasting life in God's kingdom (dealt with regularly in *Glad Tidings*). It's actually a slavery that leads to freedom! So how do we make this change?

Baptism is a Fresh Start

Jesus gives us the answer:

He who believes and is baptized will be saved... (Mark 16:16).

Baptism is a simple act with a powerful meaning. When an adult is convinced of the gospel message, they willingly choose to be baptised, as Jesus commanded. This involves being fully immersed in water and then rising immediately up again, symbolising three things:

- ◆ the washing away of their sins
- ◆ their belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus – going down into the water and rising again to a new life
- ◆ a willingness to humbly follow God's will and commit to a new way of life

Once a person has been baptised, they start this new life. Paul phrases it beautifully for us in another of his letters:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

It's Not Easy!

So, through baptism, we can transform from caterpillars to butterflies, from slaves of sin to willing servants of God. Becoming a follower of Jesus does not happen overnight. Although baptism is an essential step, it's only the beginning. The act of baptism has no mystical or spiritual power.

Sin will keep trying to regain control over us and we must constantly battle against it. Paul describes this for us from his own personal experience:

For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice (Romans 7:19).

However hard we try, we will always struggle with our natural sinful, selfish tendencies. God understands this and will forgive us when we ask Him to. We have to keep going – even if we have a bad day – and try better the next day.

A New Mind – Growing Fruit!

What does this new life look like? How can we become more like Jesus?

One of our favourite Bible passages is found in Galatians 5, and we have personally found this very helpful. Paul lists qualities that God's servants try to develop.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

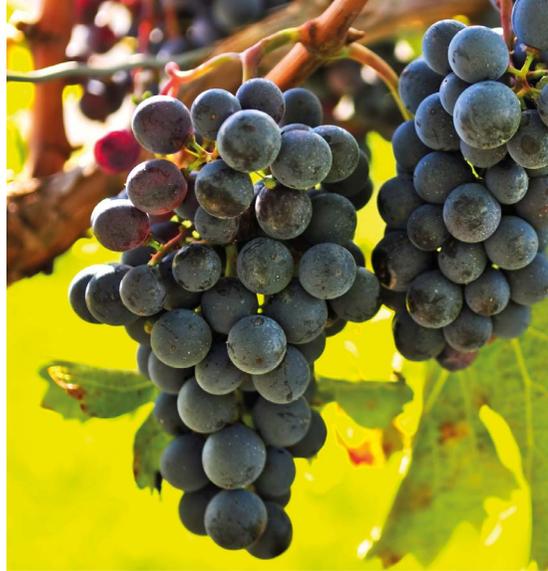
Love

Jesus showed true self-sacrificing love by dying for our sins. We should respond to this amazing act by showing love to others.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another (John 13:34).

Joy

Jesus looked to the future joy of God's kingdom to keep him going through the darkest hours of his life. This should inspire us to do the same.



[Jesus] for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

Peace

Belief in Jesus can help us stay calm in difficult situations and be at peace with whatever God has in store for us. Jesus said:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

Longsuffering

Otherwise known as patience! We should not be known for our quick tempers or for speaking without thinking but rather for our patience with others as well as in our waiting for Jesus to return.

When you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God (1 Peter 2:20).

Kindness

Our kindness should be motivated by a desire to show to others the kindness Jesus has shown to us. Even when he was in mortal pain on the cross, he was thinking of others and asked that his mother was looked after by one of his disciples, John. Kindness also involves sincerely forgiving those who have wronged us.

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32).

Goodness

We should be known for our goodness towards others, motivated by our love for God and not by a desire for thanks or praise. It is important in our speech too:

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good (Ephesians 4:29).

Faithfulness

This means being faithful to the promises we have made to God and to others. Our decisions in life should reflect our belief that God exists, He is in control and can bring us to His kingdom.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:5–6).

Gentleness

This is not about physical gentleness, which goes without saying. The word carries the

idea of humility. We should not be proud or boastful, nor should we look for revenge but always trying to see the best in people.

A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all (2 Timothy 2:24).

Self-Control

This begins in the mind. Sin will always be there and we must try to control it. This is especially true in difficult situations when our resolve is severely tested, and we may say or do things we later regret. When Jesus was tempted (Matthew 4), he overcame each temptation with a Bible truth.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus... (Philippians 2:5).

The Final Transformation

We began by looking at the dramatic change from caterpillar to butterfly. Our change, through baptism, is even more remarkable. Starting a new life and becoming like Jesus takes time and effort.

Paul calls the 9 characteristics we looked at 'the **fruit** of the Spirit', in other words, these are things that should be growing and developing in our lives. Yes, it will be hard but one day our natures will be truly transformed in God's kingdom and we will be free of sin forever!

We also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body (Philippians 3:20–21)

Ben and Becky Collard

What is Faith?

POPULAR ideas about faith vary widely and can be misleading. Many religious people think faith is a mystical gift from God that enables us to understand and relate to Him.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines faith as “strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof”.

Others may be more sceptical and add the word “blind”, their view being that faith lacks reason or evidence.

So, what is faith?

Bible-based Faith

The Bible is the key source of knowledge about God. Therefore, faith in God is best considered by consulting the Bible itself. In the rest of this article, this ‘Bible faith’ is what we are talking about. True faith in God really does involve substance and evidence.

The Bible is not an indiscriminate collection of writings. Although it was written down over at least 1,500 years by many writers from different countries and backgrounds, it presents a wonderfully unified and consistent message. One of its many consistent messages is the nature of faith.

Perhaps the greatest example is Abraham, one of the earliest characters in the Bible who lived around 2000 BC. Although he

lived such a long time ago, his example is a major strand of first century Christian teaching, with numerous references in the New Testament. Paul wrote:

Only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:7).

This is very important because it shows that true faith has remained essentially the same since the time of Abraham until now.

It is also helpful that the faith and activities of Abraham to which Paul refers are recorded for us in Genesis chapters 12–22. Go and read them for yourself! The faith of Abraham and indeed those of all ages is described like this:

He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Let’s consider two further real-life characters.

David, King of Israel

David was king of the ancient nation of Israel, reigning for 40 years in about 1000 BC. He was their greatest king, and, with the help of God, was able to continue the establishment of the nation as a kingdom.

David wrote many of the Psalms in our Bible, and he is referred to with great respect by his direct descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

To find out about David's faith we could turn to many passages, in both Old and New Testaments, but let's look at two examples.

From the Start

In 2 Samuel 7:1–17 (near the beginning of his reign) we read about long term promises God made to David and to Israel. These stayed in his mind throughout his life, and his meditations on them appear many times in the Psalms.

Although God described him as “*a man after My own heart*” (Acts 13:22), David suffered some very difficult times as king. Yet he clung to the belief that God had a settled and prosperous future for him personally, and for his descendants.

David died without seeing these promises completely fulfilled, because the complete fulfilment is through Jesus, who would come 1000 years later. But we read:

Your (royal) house and your kingdom shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16).

David believed that he would personally witness the outworking of God's plan. There is only one way this can be understood, and David explains it:

You will not leave my soul in heol [or, the grave], nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life (Psalm 16:10).

David believed that God would reward him by raising him from the dead to see this with his own eyes.

Towards the End

In words spoken at the end of his reign, we see David's faith in God as a real being who was watching, listening and interested in David.

The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer (2 Samuel 22:2).

This is not typical of ancient rulers, many of whom claimed to be ruling on behalf of a god. By contrast, David recognises the ultimate power of his God to control all the elements of the natural world in dramatic outpourings of support for His chosen subjects. David saw his God:

...upon the wings of the wind ... the LORD thundered from heaven ... He sent out lightning bolts ... the foundations of the world were uncovered at the rebuke of the LORD (v11–16).

David describes his faith in God's abilities in a dramatic a way; but expands in



verses 25–28 to describe the mercy and faithfulness of God towards him. God’s care for His people is consistent, merciful and ongoing – we can have faith in this too.

Mary, Mother of The Lord Jesus

Mary was told by an angel that by the power of God she would give birth to Jesus, the Son of God. Since she was a virgin, she knew that the conception of the Lord Jesus was one of God’s most amazing miracles.

The stigma attached to a woman having a child apparently out of wedlock doesn’t dampen her faith. She knew it was the work of a God who exists and was about to change the world through her child:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour (Luke 1:46–47).

Like David, she knew that God is all-powerful, nothing can prevent His purpose:

For He who is mighty hath done great things for me (v49).

It is worth reading Luke 1:46–55 to see this song about her faith. It shows her confidence in God’s faithful care (v55) and in His promises made to Abraham, David and others (v55).

What About Us?

Belief in God Himself, in His power, His faithfulness and His rewarding kindness and mercy to those who trust Him, are consistent elements of the faith of these great characters. They knew what God had said, and they trusted Him completely.

We can find out what God has promised, and what He wants from us, in the Bible. From here, faith can grow. It isn’t restricted to clever people, it isn’t some mystical experience, and it doesn’t require extra divine intervention.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17).

It is as simple as that. Anyone can have it and it is the only way God will accept people who wish to approach Him:

Without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Of course, we don’t have to read the Bible, it’s entirely our own choice. But if we don’t read God’s Word, we can never fully understand true faith. We may be able to have some sort of faith, but it won’t be faith in the God who really exists and really is a rewarder, and so it won’t give us what God is offering in His promises.

God’s promises are still to be completely fulfilled: the Lord Jesus Christ will return to the earth to finish God’s work in establishing His kingdom and bringing in a time of peace and righteousness.

Those who have believed His Word and respond as God asks are promised everlasting life in that wonderful time. This certainly includes Abraham, David and Mary.

If you and I share their faith, then it may include us too.

Jon Walker

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