

Last Generation

TO PREPARE YOU FOR THE FINAL CONFLICT BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL ■ VOL. 29 NO. 5

THE BATTLE FOR THE TEENAGE SOUL

RAISING GODLY CHILDREN
IN A HOSTILE WORLD



Playing to Win

Do competitive sports build moral character as many educators and coaches claim?

BY JEAN HANDWERK

The rising incidence of obese children—some of whom are already experiencing adult onset diabetes and heart disease—is alarming. Parents and educators who seek to combat childhood obesity by encouraging their children to be more active are to be commended. While active children are physically healthier, using competitive sports to accomplish this goal may have some unintended consequences. Research conducted on competitive sports yielded some sobering results about the effects of competition on a child's moral development.

In his recent book, *Aggression in the Sports World*, social scientist Gordon Russell reports on a fascinating experiment with 11-to-12-year-old boys who met for the first time at a summer camp. The boys were carefully matched on skill level and physical stature. They were assigned to one of two cabins, which the boys soon named the “Rattlers” and the “Eagles.” Strong bonds of friendship and group loyalty quickly developed within each group. Their cabins were deliberate-

ly separated a considerable distance apart, with no contact between them for a week. During that first week, the boys camped in the woods, improved a swimming hole, and enjoyed organized informal games. By week's end, each group had a stable group structure.

Then the groups were made aware of each other's existence. Strong “we” versus “they” perceptions of one another developed. When brought together for a variety of competitions like tug-of-war, touch football, baseball, and a treasure hunt, earlier expressions of good sportsmanship and mutual respect began to evaporate, and verbal and physical hostilities escalated. A conflict broke out in the mess hall with name-calling and throwing of food and dinnerware, bringing the experiment to an abrupt halt. It took several days for camp personnel to restore some semblance of peace between the Rattlers and the Eagles.

Next, several “emergencies” with potentially dire consequences for both cabins were created by the researchers. The camp food truck mysteriously developed engine failure. It could only

be started with both groups pulling together on their former tug-of-war rope. At another point the waterline broke down and the two groups were without water. The Rattlers and Eagles agreed to join forces to search for the break in the line. In both examples, it clearly paid off to cooperate with one another. Inter-group hostility gradually lessened and friendships even began to blossom between the cabins.

THE LEBANON EXPERIMENT

Dr. Russell also reported on a study that took place in Lebanon that illustrates the ease with which competition can lead to hostility, if not outright aggression. Again, boys were “matched” and assigned to two groups in the camp. Each group contained fairly equal numbers of Muslims and Christians. Friendships and camaraderie within each group developed as in the summer camp experiment. However, when competition between the groups was introduced, hostilities between the cabins became so intense—a knife was brandished—that the researcher was required to end the study early. Surprisingly, the



ancient divisions between Muslims and Christians played no part in the hostilities. The animosities developed between two temporary and artificially-created groups.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE CRITICAL TO OUTCOME

One may conclude from the summer camp studies that the way to increase liking between two competing groups is to have them cooperate in pursuit of a common goal. However, it was found that when groups had previously competed against each other, liking increased *only if they succeeded* in their shared goal. If they failed together, there was no increase in inter-group liking. However, for groups that had previously cooperated with each other, simply working together again toward a common goal, whether they succeeded or failed, resulted in increased liking between the groups.¹

It is evident that bonds established *within* competitive groups are strongest, and the greatest difficulty is in extending friendship and acceptance to anyone *outside* each group. This has enormous implications for our understanding of gangs, religions, unions, ethnic groups, language groups, social groups, international relations and even families.

AGGRESSION INHERENT IN COMPETITIVENESS

Aggression during animal play is rarely seen, yet when humans “play” organized sports, the instilled motive to “win” leads to aggression. One researcher observed that “in virtually all competitive situations, some degree of hostility develops between the competitors.” Why? Winners receive recognition, praise and rewards; losers go home with nothing. In clear contrast, animal play and true human “play” have no winners or losers. When playtime ends, no individual or group receives more of anything than the others.

MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Research shows that the more time spent in competitive sports, the less leniency athletes feel toward those who are disadvantaged by weakness, gender, age or illness.

A 40-year study has indicated that the longer athletes participate in competitive sports, the less capable they are of correct moral reasoning. The researchers conclude that competitive sports impact the cognitive moral growth of high school students in a negative way.²

The effects on 1,600 male high school seniors participating in varsity sports were analyzed. The surprising effects were increased aggression, increased irritability, reduced honesty, decreased self-control, decreased independence and an increase in ego.

*When humans “play” organized sports,
the motive to win leads to aggression—
unlike true play, which is non-aggressive.*

When the effects of watching the Soccer “World Cup” in children was studied, it was observed that quarreling occurred regularly and a fist fight broke out. Crying occurred on several occasions, generally in the context of perceived failure or injustice. Rivalry with other children increased. Altruism [consideration of others without thought for self] significantly decreased.³

SELF-INDULGENCE OR HOLINESS

The Bible teaches us to “Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” Heb. 12:14. Peace and holiness are lacking in competitive sports. One widely published and respected author wrote: “Some of the most popular amusements, such as football and boxing, have become schools of brutality.... The love of domination, the pride in mere brute force, the reckless disregard of life,

are exerting upon the youth a power to demoralize that is appalling.”⁴

“Many parents seek to promote the happiness of their children.... They allow them to engage in sports and to attend parties of pleasure, and provide them with money to use freely in display and self-gratification. The more the desire for pleasure is indulged, the stronger it becomes. The interest of these youth is more and more absorbed in amusement, until they come to look upon it as the great object of life. They form habits of idleness and self-indulgence that make it almost impossible for them ever to become steadfast Christians.” “Cares, riches, pleasures, all are used by Satan in playing the game of life for the human soul. The warning is given, ‘Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the

world, the love of the Father is not in him....’

1 John 2:15.”⁵

A BETTER WAY

Competition breeds hostility, aggression, and forgetfulness of God and heavenly principles. Cooperation, on the other hand, fosters brotherly love, peace, and mutual success. It prepares the character to dwell with heavenly beings. “The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” 1 John 2:17. ❖

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Once in a while, Jean Handwerk drives, hikes, or skis from her small homestead up in the majestic mountains of the Pacific Northwest to her mailbox, to send off articles such as this one.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEENAGE BRAIN



Ad-o-les-cence: a transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood; begins as early as age 10 and typically finishes around age 19.

BY FLORENCE CALLENDER

"The teenage brain is like a sports car. It's got a great engine, fantastic acceleration, but very poor brakes."¹ These words were uttered many years ago by a judge while sentencing two teenagers for the senseless murder of a man in Pennsylvania.

For generations, the teenage brain has been fascinating yet frustrating to adults. The sheer abandon of youth is admired, while their seemingly inherent foolhardiness leaves the adult onlooker exasperated. Sometimes, teenagers seem to morph from rational beings to brash mad caps with warp speed. What is going on inside these wonderful creatures, who are no longer children, but not

yet adults? It would certainly help to gain insights into the physical and emotional changes taking place in the teenage body.

CAUTION: CONSTRUCTION ZONE

For generations, the prevailing thinking was that the brain achieved maximum growth by the time the child reached puberty. Consequently, by age 14 youth were expected to behave like adults. Beginning in the 1990s, however, that line of thinking began to change. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, although the female brain reaches maximum size at age 11, and the male at 14,

the brain continues to develop and mature into the mid to late 20s.²

One wonders then, what happens during those transitional years between childhood and adulthood? Over the last decades, the fields of neuroscience and psychology have sought to dismiss commonly held myths about teens, as well as provide suggestions for negotiating the sometimes-volatile adolescent years.

The teenager's mind can be likened to a city under reconstruction, a massive project unlike any other over the course of life. Under the influence of new hormonal messages, the brain is literally reshaped and rebuilt. Information highways that are used often are speeded up



(in a process called myelination), while unused ones are closed (pruning) and new connections are formed between old routes (sprouting). All this febrile and expansive activity explains the confused and unpredictable behavior that surfaces at times in youth.³

The re-wiring happening in the brain goes along with the forming of a new identity for the teenager. New academic challenges at school, new friends who are becoming more influential than before, new ideas demanding a stance, all these force teenagers to define themselves. Since they are still searching, adolescents are drawn towards new experiences. Here is a golden opportunity for parents, teachers, and mentors to shape the lives of youth by supervising their teenager in trying out new, yet wholesome, experiences, roles, ideas or events. Safe exploration coupled with guidance will allow adolescents to gradually find themselves. Otherwise, they may default to their peer's worldview and behavior, or worse, to the opposite of that of their parents.⁴ Adults can help adolescents tremendously by teaching interpersonal skills, assessing their innate talents and abilities, and developing a plan to maximize their aptitudes for unselfish service.

When it comes to learning, renowned neurologist Dr. Frances E. Jensen found that, "Teens are better learners than adults because their brain cells more readily 'build' memories." This is good news: all that learning in school, positive experiences and the instruction from parents and mentors are likely to stick over the long term. Conversely, negative experiences have a greater impact on the teenager than on the adult. The increased ability to learn maybe "hijacked" by addiction, which can be

stronger and lengthier than for adults, and may result in memory problems lasting into later adult years.⁵

PLAYING WITH FIRE

At times, teenagers display behavior that is impulsive, irrational or dangerous. They tend to act before considering the outcome of their actions. Scientists have attributed the cause to the interplay between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex. The amygdala is the part of the brain that is responsible for immediate reactions including fear and aggressive behavior. The prefrontal cortex is the area responsible for reasoning, planning, prioritizing and controlling impulses—in other words, rational decision-making. In adults, the emotional reactions of the amygdala are balanced by the rational messages of the prefrontal cortex. Yet the prefrontal cortex is the last part of the brain to mature, hence the trigger-happy attitude of teenagers.⁶

Adults can create opportunities to educate the youth about the connection between their brains and their behavior, provide them with tools to manage their impulses, and help them formulate strategies and systems to function optimally. One way to help adolescents overcome making hasty and risky decisions is to "loan" them a piece of your prefrontal cortex. If for example, Junior wants to go to a party where alcohol is being served, help him think beforehand of the scenarios that may come up and the consequences that would follow. Explain what those consequences will cost him in terms of money, loss of virtue, shame, negative health effects, lost opportunities, etc.

Moreover, teenagers can be taught how to set meaningful spiritual, mental, physical and emotional goals. Then they should be trained to identify the obstacles in the way of their development and be intentional about eliminating or working around them. With practice, they can achieve an admirable level of maturity. This type of training will enable teenagers to stand for what is right, regardless of the cultural and

ideological changes in the world that run contrary to God's Word.

On the positive side, teenagers see no barriers to achievement and can therefore move beyond the limits imposed by adults. They bring new perspectives to old problems. Perhaps it is this aspect that propelled a 16-year old volunteer lab assistant in the Cystic Fibrosis Lab of Toronto's SickKids Hospital in 2011 to make a groundbreaking discovery that was missed by more seasoned scientists.⁷

STRESS

Stress is a naturally occurring byproduct of living. However, with the teenager's move away from parents to greater peer affiliation comes the weight of peer pressure—a substantial desire to be accepted among friends.

During adolescence, there are significant shifts in stress reactivity. Researcher psychologist Adriana Galvan, says that teenagers experience stress more intensely than adults, and there is a connection between levels of stress and decision-making. She found that the reward system in teenagers' brains fires up more than in adults' brains when making risky choices. With the prefrontal cortex still in the developing stage, which predisposes them to superficial reasoning, this is another factor that makes them more prone to taking risky and possibly dangerous actions.⁸

Open communication is pivotal here. Like everyone else, teenagers are looking to understand themselves. When they comprehend that there are physiological reasons for what they are experiencing, when adults communicate and empathize with them instead of punishing them, when they recognize that the grown-ups around them are supporting them, new lines of communication will be opened. These conversations should include everything from the consequences of digital technologies on their brain development to slavishly following their peers, pornography, vandalism, etc. Once they are taught about the neural

connection between stress and poor decision-making, which may result in unhappiness, depression and other mental health disorders, they will hopefully make better choices.

SLEEP

Major brain development occurs while teenagers sleep, which might explain why the average teen needs about nine hours of sleep each night to feel rested and alert. This includes the process that makes learning possible. Nonetheless, most teenagers are night owls. They are up well past midnight. Part of this late going-to-sleep is due to the lure of electronic devices and social media, and part to the sleep-regulating hormones, which are released in the brains of teenagers later than in adults (around 1:00 AM in teens, compared to 10:00 PM in adults). Having to rise early day after day, because of school or other commitments leads to chronic sleep deprivation.⁹

Not only is adequate sleep essential for physical well-being, but also for emotional health. In addition to fatigue and decreased attention, researchers have reported that sleep deprivation can increase irritability, depression and impulsive behavior.

True leaders exemplify the behavior they wish to cultivate in their followers. Living by example was practiced from antiquity. The apostle Paul told his listeners, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." 1 Cor. 11:1. Similarly, parents and other influential adults should live in such a way that when they speak to the adolescent, they can point to their own lifestyle as an example of intentional, mature living. This should be played out not only in the big lifestyle choices, but also in the

seemingly smaller ones, like going to bed on time.

MUSIC

Music is an integral part of our lives—it influences people of any age and social group. Perhaps, the group most influenced is teenagers, either positively or negatively.

"Some studies have shown that music lyrics and images may have a significant impact on how youth think, feel, and behave. Children and adolescents often use music to explore their identity and discover how they fit in. They often imitate what musical role models do and say—trying on new roles as their personal identity develops. Music provides a way for youth to express and explore their feelings and emotions."¹⁰ Often lyrics contribute to the glamorization of drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, violent or inappropriate sex.

The earlier parents and mentors can start talking to their teenagers about music, the better. The conversation on music should include purchasing, downloading, listening and music video viewing patterns. They should be counseled that certain types of music, which glamorize illicit sex, violence, substance use, suicide or present a skewed body image, can have destructive consequences. Use as a springboard for discussion the song lyrics themselves. The goal is to foster critical thinking and self-reflection. When that is achieved, youth become leaders who are strategic thinkers, able to stand firm in their beliefs, regardless of threatened consequences for their position.

THE SPRINGTIME OF LIFE

Adolescence is one stage in the rhythm of life, a part of the natural human growth cycle. Ecclesiastes

3:1 tells us, "To everything there is a season; a time for every purpose under heaven." Adults can assist teenagers as they wade through their uncertainties and unfamiliar physical changes. Parents and mentors must help them embrace this time of life as a necessary and exciting phase of mind and body maturation.

Regardless of where a plant is placed, it always grows towards the sun. If we teach teenagers to grow towards the Sun of Righteousness, to get to know Jesus Christ and develop a personal relationship with Him, they will be prepared to navigate the vicissitudes of life. We would have built the foundation for them to be an example to other youth and stand strong until the end of time. ❖

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Major brain development occurs while teenagers sleep, which explains why the average teen needs about nine hours of sleep each night to feel rested and alert.

20 TIMELESS SKILLS A TEEN SHOULD KNOW TODAY

Teenagers who develop practical skills, common sense, and a kind and courteous heart are naturally more confident and secure with both their peers and adults.



01. How to wait and save for something

02. How to admit a mistake

03. How to take notice of needs around you

04. How to balance a checkbook

05. How to see a job through to completion

06. How to do laundry



07. How to fix something instead of replacing it

08. How to weigh out pros and cons of a decision

09. How to make a genuine apology

10. How to wash dishes



11. How to make a budget

12. How to seek counsel from someone more experienced

13. How to introduce yourself

14. How to plan a healthy meal

15. How to give someone the benefit of the doubt

16. How to write a letter



17. How to sew on a button

18. How to ask questions to get to know someone better

19. How to do something well, even if no one is watching

20. How to be KIND!



Selected by 10 participants ages 18–60, both male and female, from “40 Old Fashioned Skills for Kids Today,” <https://frugalfun4boys.com/40-old-fashioned-skills-for-kids-today/>

THE BATTLE FOR THE TEENAGE SOUL

Through wise training, the teenager in your life may become responsible, mature, and godly.

BY ANTONELLA PEDLEY

Ah, the teenage years! Messy bedrooms, slammed doors, forbidden items hidden who knows where, late nights and equally late mornings, unkept promises, eyes flashing with rebellion, muttered excuses, raised voices and peppered language—or instead just stony indifference and deafening silence. Where did those angelic little children go? And how did they turn into these monstrous aliens from another planet? Many adults identify with these kinds of questions in connection with the teenager they happen to parent, grandparent, mentor or teach.

The general view contemporary society has taken on adolescence is that it is something to be survived. This dim outlook is echoed by experts

such as Anna Freud, Sigmund Freud's psychologist daughter: "To be normal during the adolescent period is by itself abnormal."¹

Added to the challenge of raising teenagers is the relentless barrage of advertising vying for their brand loyalty and dollars, often promoting products that aren't exactly good for them. The new communication technologies have revolutionized the way ideas are propagated, removing traditional gatekeepers of information and exposing individuals to an ocean of unevaluated materials. The 24-hour-on social media is burdening young people with pressures never-before experienced in humankind's history. In a society that has seemingly lost its moral

moorings, for the embattled adult dealing with teenagers raging with hormones and facing peer-pressure, the aim to raise them to become balanced adults appears idealistic. Moreover, for the Christian parent or mentor, hoping for a well-anchored religious adult to emerge on the other side of adolescence seems the stuff of dreams. In the meantime, life may feel more like a nightmare, punctuated by tearful prayers and much heartache.

But before you throw in the towel, take courage! The picture is not as grim as it is often portrayed. And there is a help, which appears simple but may require a little of your time and effort. In order for the tools described below to be successful, they need to part of



your daily routine. Also, remember that there is no perfect parent or teacher; we are all humans. Additionally, your teenager is a free moral agent that may choose the wrong path, despite excellent parenting or mentoring. Yet, the following four tools will go a long way towards giving it your best shot, and they all start with understanding your teenager.

1 PLAN THEIR EMANCIPATION

Adolescence starts at 11–12 (officially at 13) years of age and ends with reaching the age of majority (18 years). It is a time of great transformation, in which the child turns into an adult, with all the privileges and responsibilities this entails. The primary need of the teenager is individuation, the gradual severing of the figurative umbilical cord that has tied the child to the parent and becoming their own person. The adolescent yearns to be seen as a budding adult but is hard at work figuring out exactly what kind of adult he or she wants to be.

The child looks to the parent for everything from guidance and support to physical and emotional comfort. But when the child turns into a teenager, the parent must begin to let go and prepare the teen for adulthood by progressively handing over control in different areas of life. Explain to your teen that with more freedom comes responsibility and clear expectations. That freedom may be enjoyed within certain well-established boundaries, and when crossed, will result in consequences. As he or she earns your trust in one area, you may move to emancipating him or her in another area, all the while keeping the communication channels open.

2 CULTIVATE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Someone once said that rules without relationships end in

rebellion. Since the transition of parenting a teen means diminishing control over their choices, it is imperative to trade control for influence. Earlier in history, young people spent most of their time with other adults. Yet today, long school hours, engagement in a myriad of extracurricular activities, and busy or dysfunctional families mean that adolescents spend the vast majority of their time either with their peers or alone. Even church is often segregated, with separate youth services, activities, and events. Meanwhile, studies show emphatically that “the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. Grandparents and other relatives, mentors and youth workers can be very influential as well.”²

But influence happens only in a relationship of trust. A recent study by the Fuller Youth Institute found

Explain to your teen that with more freedom comes more responsibility and higher expectations.

that 70 percent of church-going high school students have serious doubts about their faith, yet less than half of them felt comfortable sharing their doubts with an adult.³ Developing a relationship of trust with your teenager is vital.

Begin by spending time together. Share meals as often as possible and seek opportunities to do fun things together. Stay up to date with their daily activities and concerns. Let them know, by words and deeds, that you like them and love them.

Continue by engaging in meaningful conversations. This may feel hard in the beginning. Teenagers can sometimes act in immature ways that hurt you, either through their words or their apparent indifference. Unconsciously, we try to shield our feelings and keep the communication shallow or at a

minimum. Remember that they are a “work in progress.” Deep down, they yearn for communication with adults, so don’t be easily put off.

Find those golden moments when your teenager is open to deeper talks. Bring up weighty topics like faith in God, evolution, alcohol, sex, drugs, homosexuality, etc. Open up about your own struggles and how you have overcome them. Instead of lecturing, ask for their opinion. Use real-life stories to illustrate the dangers of risky behavior and ask if this could happen to their friends. But don’t leave it there.

3 TEACH, EXPLAIN, AND LIVE YOUR FAITH

Religion is a key ingredient in anyone’s life, including in that of adolescents. One study in particular has been extremely helpful in shedding light on the religious lives of one nation’s teenagers.

The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) is the “largest, most comprehensive and detailed study of American teenage religion and spirituality conducted to date.”⁴ It found that “religious faith and

practice themselves exert significant, positive, direct, and indirect influences on the lives of teenagers, helping to foster healthier, more engaged adolescents who live more constructive and promising lives.” “Highly religious teenagers appear to be doing much better in life than less religious teenagers.”⁵

The same study found that, far from the conventional ‘storm and stress’ stereotype, the vast majority of American teenagers are “exceedingly conventional in their religious identity and practices,” seeming “content to follow the faith of their families with little questioning.” There are indeed teens who are rebellious and forsake their parent’s religion, but they are a small minority.⁶ However, the statistics of young people dropping out of church are sobering. So, if not

while teenagers, when do young people lose their faith? The 2017 LifeWay Research survey showed that youngsters abandon church at some point after leaving home, either when going to college or when starting their first jobs.⁷ In other words, adolescence may be the last time window to positively influence religious life.

Another sobering finding of the NYSR is that the vast majority of teenagers were “incredibly inarticulate about their faith, their religious beliefs and practices and its meaning or place in their lives.”⁸ Moreover, they had “often fallacious knowledge of the belief content of their own religious traditions which they claim to embrace” and “communities of faith are failing in attempts to educate their youth.”⁹ Parents seem to be failing at this task too.

No wonder the Bible places such emphasis on passing on the faith: “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” Deut. 6:6–7. Notice that teaching should not be done on special occasions—it needs to permeate day-to-day life. As mentioned above, bring up in conversation various aspects of faith, and after patiently listening to your teenager, share what you think is

right and explain why that is so. My own two teenagers have

asked me repeatedly to explain my stance on various issues.

We often assume that young people just want entertainment, yet a study of 250 congregations suggests that “youth and young adults want substance rather than style.”¹⁰ At this crucial time of laying the foundations of their life principles, it is absolutely vital to teach and show why. Speak of your own faith. Unfortunately, many adults are not sure why they believe certain things. Educate yourself to give informed answers and point your teenager to further resources in the form of books, articles, podcasts, documentaries or connect them with knowledgeable adults.

4 EQUIP THEIR SELF-WORTH

Coined during World War II, “teenager” is a relatively modern term. Earlier in history, adolescents were responsible for various domestic activities, such as cooking, herding, tending to the fields, caring for animals and much more. In the last century, social reforms have rightly ended labor practices that exploited children. Yet adolescence today is a long waiting chamber to adulthood, with few real-life responsibilities. The message being conveyed to teenagers is that they are nowhere near maturity for the adult world.¹¹

As a result, young people sometimes experience “a feeling of uselessness and inertia.”¹² The remedy is quite simple: teach your kids to work and give them real responsibilities. Work together with your children, whether it’s cooking,

building, garden maintenance, or crafts. Learning new skills, becoming proficient, seeing the fruit of their labor and being appreciated for it, and especially doing good to others, builds value into our teenagers and gives them a healthy sense of self-worth.

In conclusion, viewing teenagers through the ‘storm and stress’ lens is unhelpful and counterproductive. Adolescents may come across as immature, even rebellious, but learn to read beyond appearances. They are longing for meaningful relationships and you, as a parent, have the greatest influence, for good or ill and whether you realize it or not. Mentors and educators share in that influence. What is required of you is to give of your time and effort, be the best person you can be, and all along, daily commit your teenager in prayer to the heavenly Father, Who loves them the most. ❖

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Passing on your faith to the next generation is done best when it permeates your every-day life.



It turns out that fathers play the most important role in passing on spiritual values to their children.

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

BY VANESA G. ESTECHE AND BETSY MAYER

"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck." Prov. 1:8–9. These words were penned by King David's son, Solomon, considered by many to be the wisest man who ever lived.

The text mentions both parents, but often mothers are thought to have more spiritual influence. Could we be underestimating the influence of fathers in the development of their children's relationship with God?

University of Southern California professor Vern Bengtson noted "the outsized importance of dads when it comes to religious observance."¹ According to his research, "56 percent of kids who have a close relationship with their dads share his level of religious commitment, while just 36 percent of kids with a weaker relationship to their father can say the same thing."²

The vital role fathers play in influencing their children's church attendance was documented by Swiss researchers: "If a father does go [to church] regularly, regardless of the practice of the mother, between two-thirds and three-quarters of their children will become churchgoers (regular and irregular)."³ But, "if a father does not go to church, no matter how faithful his wife's devotions [are], only one child in 50 will become a regular worshipper."⁴

Beyond church attendance, a father who takes his religion seriously can give other important advantages to his children. Social scientists Loren Marks and David Dollahite of Louisiana State University researched the impact a father's religious beliefs has on a child's future.⁵ Marks and Dollahite studied 130 families from different religious backgrounds, including Mormons, Jews, Moslems, and Christians and found three common "faith factors" that made a positive impact on children:

1. Religious fathers are more committed to the institution of marriage and are much more likely to have stronger marriages; children who come from stable marriages have more positive life outcomes.
2. Religious fathers rarely abuse alcohol or drugs; an estimated 80 percent of child abuse is related to substance abuse.
3. Religious fathers feel accountable to God to lead their families and therefore take their roles more seriously.

Fathers who shared these characteristics were more capable of positively influencing their children. By contrast, children who come from homes with weak or non-existent bonds with a father have a higher incidence of "adverse outcomes" such as criminal activity, substance abuse, not finishing school, mental illness, and sexual promiscuity, among others.⁶ In the midst

of our precarious almost-fatherless societies, these facts should bring us back to our God-given roots.

The Bible gives parents, and especially fathers this solemn charge:

"And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Deut. 6:5–7.

Fathers, this is your most important task! This goes beyond religious instruction. It includes modeling a life of righteousness. How you treat others and how you honor God will be forever etched in your children's minds. Coupled with affection and regular time spent with family, your example is the most important key to their spiritual development. ❖

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Inside the Mind of a **Rebellious** Teenager

I do not want a daughter like myself. I doubt anyone would. But the roots of my rebellion might help you to understand another rebellious teenager—perhaps even your own.

BY YIK MIN WONG

Seven years ago, even my mother would have agreed that I was a lost cause.

The year 2012 was the very peak of my rebellion. My poor mother was at her wit's end and could not imagine that one day her daughter would turn from darkness to light—that I'd quit all the partying, drinking, and hanging out with the wrong crowd.

But looking back, I now understand that I did not turn into a rebel overnight. In fact, my rebellion had a lot to do with my home environment.

THE "BAD LUCK" GIRL

I was the only extroverted child amongst my three introverted, submissive siblings. My older sister was the firstborn. She was smart, diligent, and always knew what to say and when to say it. From my perspective, my brother, being the only son, was spoiled rotten. Also from my perspective, my younger sister, being the youngest, got away with

everything. Sandwiched in between, I felt rejection and loneliness as I saw favoritism being played out towards my siblings.

When it came to material things, my mother wanted to give us the best that she could, but being the housewife of a new government sector worker, her hands were tied. Instead, the "good stuff" came from our grandmother, because she was doing well financially. It seemed to me that all my siblings had to do was ask Grandmother for something, and it was given. But when I tried to ask for things, all I got back were remarks of how undeserving I was due to my "attitude."

My grandmother was a traditional, superstitious Chinese who regarded me as the "omen" that brought her bad luck, because according to a fortune teller, my "star sign conflicted with hers." My outgoing, curious, boisterous personality did not help either. In submissive Asian culture, it is considered disre-

spectful to "talk back" to an elder. I remembered that when I spoke up against unfair treatment, all my pleas and self-defense fell on deaf ears, as anything that came out of my mouth was considered rude. With this prejudice towards me, I was not allowed to express my views, only to submit. But even though I tried to be obedient, I still did not receive affection from my grandmother, nor my father, or any uncles and aunts, as they all viewed me the same.

Because of my reputation for being a problematic child with an "attitude," strict rules would be imposed only on me. My mother was the only one who would stand up for me amidst the unfairness that happened. But her defense was never enough. I felt overwhelmed and broken.

Out of this overwhelming suppression, something inside of me snapped. Since nothing that I had done could ever be right, I wanted to prove them right. Hence I turned into a die-hard rebel; I did everything I wanted to my



heart's content and nobody could stop me. Freedom never tasted so good as I broke from the chain of rules imposed upon me. I did not care what my family thought about me and went out with anyone I wanted to at any given time. I refused to listen to anybody and started smoking, drinking—you name it. I was the life of the party, and it felt great! In the wee hours of morning I felt my system pumped up with adrenalin. For the first time ever I thought I was experiencing true freedom—free to be who I was.

A REBEL DRAWN BY LOVE

I was at the pinnacle of my partying phase when Denise, a friend from high school with whom I'd lost touch with for years, reached out to me. As we conversed over lunch, she told me about her life, her church friends, and so on. I listened to her attentively as I admired the bonds that she shared with her church family. But being a wild party "animal," at that point church was not on my list of "places I'd like to visit." Nonetheless, Denise invited me to her Care Group, where young people gathered at someone's home every Friday evening to have supper and share some thoughts from the Bible. After several relentless invitations, I finally gave in.

To my surprise, the Care Group family treated me with much warmth and love, something I had never felt even from my own family. Drawn by this love, I kept going back to the Care Group, and eventually stepped foot into the Sabbath-keeping church the organizers attended. Denise was persistent in taking me early on Saturday mornings, despite my reluctance.

The family that held Care Group in their home, the Teens, ended up becoming my adopted family. They gave me great encouragement from the Bible and received me as their own as they helped me overcome the temptations of nightlife. They knew that I was wild and could potentially be a bad influence among the youth, but they accepted me anyway. Being submerged in the Word of God, my life changed tremendously as I slowly reduced my pub visits. I cut off ties with the "party people" as I changed my circle of friends. Soon, I became best friends with the secretary of my church, Mabelle, who was a year older than me. She, too, constantly guided me back to the Lord whenever I felt temptations to return to my old life.

As I felt the love of God shown by God-fearing people, this eventually chipped away the strong exterior that I portrayed, masking the brokenness that stemmed from the rejection I felt from my family. God took away my broken heart and gave me a new one. And just when I thought I was unwanted, rejected even by my own family, Christ came into my life and gave me a new family. In time, I learned to forgive my family, just as God had forgiven me.

A rebellious teen just may be someone who has sought to be heard and loved, and failed. I implore



everyone to reach out to the ones that seem hard to reach, because deep inside, they may be as broken as I was. Be patient with them and do not judge these people for their present situation, as no one is a lost cause. Healing takes time.

Everyone has the power of influence over someone's life. As we show Christ-like love towards these teens, the chains of Satan can be broken as his lies about their identity are unmasked and they learn their true identity from the Word of God. In time, they too can become a new creature in Christ as portrayed by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." ❖

Yik Min Wong is a Bible Instruction major at Hartland College and a production assistant for Last Generation magazine.



As we show Christ-like love towards rebellious teens, the chains of Satan can be broken as his lies about their identity are unmasked and they learn their true identity from the Word of God.

Preventing Teenage Addictions

The teenage brain is far more vulnerable to addiction than is the adult brain—with devastating lifelong consequences.



BY GILLIAN BETHEL, PhD

While teenage addiction has been the staple of headlines for decades, today there is good news and bad news surrounding the subject. The good news is that substance abuse among teenagers has been on a downward trend in the last five years in the United States.¹ The bad news is that technology addiction has skyrocketed—teens themselves estimate that 60 percent of their friends are addicted to their smartphone.² The current generation of teenagers has been aptly called “screenagers” or iGen-ers. But of more concern is that smartphone addiction is linked to the sharp increase in teenage depression, self-harm and suicide rates, especially among girls.³

While researchers still debate whether smartphone addiction is the cause or the effect of emotional

problems, one thing is certain: there is an urgent need for parents to understand why teenagers are so vulnerable and how they can help their teen avoid addiction of any kind. Reviewing some factors that predispose teenagers to addictions is a good way to start.

AN ANATOMY OF TEENAGE ADDICTION

The brain of a young person is not fully matured until the mid-twenties.⁴ Three areas of the brain are still developing in teens: the nucleus accumbens which releases dopamine—the “happiness hormone,” the amygdala which processes emotions and triggers stress reactions, and the prefrontal cortex where judgments and decisions are made.⁵ Scientists believe this “work in progress” accounts for major fea-

tures of the teenage years—desire for excitement and pleasure, tendency to stress and moodiness, and impulsive or wrong decisions. Add this to the teenage search for independence and approval from peers, and it’s clear that encouragement, guidance, and support will be needed. Addictions can take root if they’re not available.

What is the attraction of addictive substances and behaviors? “When I first took heroin, I felt like I was home, safe and loved—after years of dread, rejection, and loneliness. ...The drug allowed me to feel as though I had the radiant warmth of unconditional acceptance, the bliss of being truly cared for,” writes Maia Szalavitz, a neuroscience journalist and author.⁶ Using heroin, like other addictive substances or activities, at first creates feelings of well-being and acceptance like those found in

fulfilling relationships.

Addiction also starts with another lure: "It's where I could find stress relief," Catherine Townsend-Lyon says of her gambling addiction, "I didn't have to worry about anything—whether it was my past, whether it was the money I'd spent. You don't think about any of it. It's like you just go there and you're escaping into a whole different world."⁷ Escape from stress and problems are the other reward held out by addictive activities. Both acceptance and escape are very attractive to teenagers.

Sometimes adolescents are trying to escape from past or present emotional hurt in the form of neglect, abuse or bullying. Unfortunately, addictive substances or behaviors become the go-to for numbing the pain they cannot cope with. And it may not even be a well-defined hurt, but rather a general anxiety or uncertainty. One psychology professor describes some of these uncertainties: *economic uncertainty*—in the current shaky economic climate, anticipating a worse economic future than their parents, *uncertain independence*—having overinvolved parents who suffocate their attempts at learning self-reliance, and *uncertain truths*—growing up in a world of relative truths, with no solid foundation for knowledge and morality.⁸

UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION

So what exactly is addiction? A debate has raged for years over whether it is the result of poor choices or a brain disease. The latter is now widely accepted, but there is a third definition which makes sense: addiction is a learning disorder. Here's how it works. When we love someone, for example our parent, spouse, or child, spending time with that person releases brain chemicals such as dopamine that make us happy. We learn to seek out their presence, because it makes us feel safe. "Similarly, if the brain 'decides' that a drug or activity is somehow essential to [our] emo-

tional survival," it initiates the same type of neurochemistry and learned emotional association as experienced when bonding with a person.⁹ This explains why gambling, which involves no harmful substances, can become an addiction.

Unfortunately, addiction feeds on dysfunctional learning. Once the brain expects a certain reward, even going after it becomes rewarding. For example, according to researchers, seeing a packet of cocaine can give a bigger dopamine rise than snorting the cocaine.¹⁰ This phenomenon sets off cravings and can keep an addiction going even when the activity itself becomes less rewarding, as happens when the brain becomes tolerant of a drug.

Another mental feature—persistence—can keep addictions with reduced rewards active. If reward levels drop, many people will stop a behavior, but strangely, fewer rewards can also cause an individual to intensify addictive behavior. The reason is that the very uncertainty of a reward may increase efforts to get it. Psychologist B. F. Skinner discovered that if rats were not rewarded every time, they pushed a lever, they pushed it more often than rats that were consistently rewarded. This happens with gambling, gaming and social media—they all successfully use the same "variable rate reinforcement" Skinner used with rats. That is why electronic media have addictive potential too.

Addiction can be particularly damaging to a developing brain. For example, studies of teens who used marijuana heavily showed abnormal brain structures resulting in poor memory performance two years after stopping it. The younger the teens were when they started heavy marijuana use, the greater the brain abnormalities.¹¹ Teenage binge drinking affects attention, memory, and decision making in the short-term.¹²

A CONTEMPORARY SOURCE OF ADDICTION

Electronic media invite addiction. Games and social media platforms

are designed to give dopamine rushes to keep people coming back. They also create stress. Studies have found high levels of the stress hormone cortisol in teens who spend a lot of time with smartphones and tablets. Chronically elevated cortisol interferes with learning and memory, affects decision making and emotional regulation and predisposes to depression.¹³ Dopamine, therefore, becomes the bait that keeps teens coming back to devices which, ironically, have a negative emotional effect. But why do they get stressed?

Game playing is designed to be emotionally exciting and requires high levels of mental alertness, elevating stress levels. But social factors are also involved in media addiction. Many teens today rely on their smartphones for continuous contact with and approval from peers. As receiving "likes" and gaining "followers" becomes a measure of self-worth, depression can set in from comparing others' apparently exciting lives and popularity with one's own. Spending time online also can produce extreme emotional pain. One teen writes, "Cell phones directly promote cyber-bullying. Students ... have many opportunities to torment others. There have been several incidents where students have committed suicide for hurtful comments from their classmates."¹⁴

Another writes, "Society is killing us. We will never really be accepted. If you're skinny they call you anorexic. If you're big-boned, they call you fat. If you have good grades you're a nerd. If you have bad grades, you will never succeed. If you cry you are a baby. If you laugh too much you are obnoxious. Society can never be pleased. It will pull and pick at you until there is nothing left of your self-esteem."¹⁵

Spending time online delivers both pleasure and pain to an adolescent, and like the rats' increased lever pushing, media-induced stress and emotional pain can encourage a teenager to spend *more* time with their phone in hopes of receiving comfort and encourage-

ment. This is how smartphones can become so addictive.

PARENTS CAN HELP

It requires strong motivation to overcome addiction. Therefore, parents would be wise to prevent addiction from taking hold in the first place. This is done best by clearing the ground of any roots from which addiction could grow. As we have seen, addiction flourishes as a would-be substitute for the love and security found in the parent-child relationship. The solution here is all too obvious: create strong bonds of love with your teenager. If they do not get it from you (and they need to get it from somewhere,) they may seek that feeling in addictions. If parents can create bonds with their teenagers, the dopamine rewards from parental love can be stronger and more consistent than any phones and drugs can provide.

In the words of teenagers: "In order for parents to be the best they can be, they must always love, support, protect, and push their kids. Too many kids live life with no relationships with their parents. It is important that parents interact with their kids more and are more involved in their lives."¹⁶ "It is important that your child receives emotional support from you and knows that you are proud of him/her. Show strong love and affection openly and often."¹⁷

Being listened to with an attitude of caring and respect always draws a teen closer and releases dopamine, creating well-being. In the words of another adolescent: "Do not criticize but sympathize with us. Nobody likes criticism and it rarely has ever helped."¹⁸

Communication works best when parents accept that their children are changing. A new start must be made by getting to know this fledgling adult with wonderful potential. Give them enough room so they can grow

towards the light instead of surviving in your shadow. At the same time, be intentional about building a strong foundation of life principles on which your teenager can continue to build.

Parents need to provide a safe environment for their teenagers, free of abuse or neglect. If serious emotional wounds have already been inflicted, seek specialist help. And if peer conflict in school is a problem, parents can encourage teens to join activities with a more like-minded peer group.

Another strong deterrent to addictions is helping your teenager receive the feel-good brain chemicals the way they are obtained naturally: through rewarding real-life activities. Exercise and service to others are healthy and powerful sources of dopamine. Keep them

As caring adults model the kindness and firmness of God, pointing to Him as the unfailing source of power, teens can learn to trust Him through the storms of adolescence.

busy and involved with good things they can enjoy! I love the story of 10-year-old Julia who received a smart phone as a gift but later returned it because it was interfering with her art!

Lastly, here are some smartphone rules followed by psychologist Jean Twenge and her teenagers: Firstly, no smartphones in the bedroom at night. Secondly, no smartphone activity one hour before bedtime. (Plenty of quality sleep is vital for teenagers.) Thirdly, for yourself and your teenagers, limit device time to less than two hours of leisure time a day. (It's important to lead by example.)¹⁹ It's also helpful to monitor their social media activity to spot any abusive communication and help them handle it, ideally within a relationship of trust.

Most importantly, parents need to pray a lot. If they can model the firm and caring love of God, pointing them to Him as the unfailing source

of comfort, understanding, power, hope, and encouragement, He will help adolescents weather the storms of growing up. Jesus was once a teenager Himself, and He offers unlimited security, growth, and love without addiction!❖

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Gillian Bethel, PhD, taught stress management for ten years and is the author of *From Stress to Joy*.

LESSONS FROM THE SAN FRANCISCO EARTHQUAKE

WAS IT A JUDGMENT FROM GOD?

BY FRANCIS A. SOPER

Shortly after 5AM on Wednesday, April 18, 1906, the Golden Gate City was awakening from sleep. Suddenly, there was roaring thunder. The ground quaked and quivered like jelly. Terrified people, screaming and crying, ran around madly.

Fires broke out, fueled by burst gas lines, and turned communities into raging infernos. For three consecutive days, firefighters were unable to stop the holocaust because of broken water mains.

Tremors and aftershocks were felt as far north as Canada, and house

chimneys toppled in Cincinnati, Ohio, 2,350 miles away.

By the time the fires were brought under control, three-fourths of San Francisco was destroyed; 450 lives were lost; 300,000 people were homeless; 500 city blocks had been razed; and damages were assessed at \$500 million.¹

At the time, San Francisco, California, was described as “the most careless city on the continent,” a city with a thousand saloonkeepers among its registered voters, more than the number of grocers, and the

addition of a thousand bartenders.² Public officers were selected at the bidding of the liquor industry, and its control over the city government was virtually complete.

WAKE-UP CALL

Many lessons can be learned from tragedies—either how to avoid them if possible, or how to cope with such problems if they should reoccur. Following the great earthquake and fire, the city’s political machine disappeared. A major increase in crime was expected because of the chaos, but

such was not the case. "Puppet Mayor Schmitz threw off his shackles and rose to inspiring heights. He forgot himself, and began serving the people, really serving. He often said that his life began on April 18. His first order was to close every saloon in the city and to destroy their stocks, to break the bottles and empty the barrels."³

Ellen G. White, a Christian author and avid temperance leader at the time, also commented on the mayor's bravery: "For a time after the great earthquake along the coast of California, the authorities in San Francisco and in some of the smaller cities and towns, ordered the closing of all liquor saloons.

"So marked were the effects of this strictly enforced ordinance, that the attention of thinking men throughout America, and notably on the Pacific Coast, was directed to the advantages that would result from a permanent closing of all saloons.... This remarkable freedom from violence and crime was traceable largely to the disuse of intoxicants."⁴

Newspaper reports confirmed these results as well:

May 2: "The military authorities, while fire was in progress, effected the destruction of practically all the liquor in the retail districts by emptying bottles and barrels in the streets." —*San Francisco Chronicle*

May 5: "San Francisco for the past fortnight has been absolutely free from crimes of violence. There have been no street brawls. No drunken brute has beaten his wife. No gamblers have murdered each other in low resorts.... It is a most impressive object lesson in the value to society of the restriction of the liquor traffic." —*San Francisco Chronicle*

May 12: "You may say for me that the saloons will remain closed indefi-

nately in San Francisco. Peace and quiet have prevailed since all traffic in liquor was stopped, and no saloon will be permitted to open until such time as there is no likelihood of complaint." —*The Call, interview with Mayor Schmitz, p. 1*

June 15: "We have now had a two months' object lesson which has convinced the public that freedom from saloons involves freedom from a great mass of crime." —*San Francisco Chronicle*

June 22: "*The Bulletin* has not approved of all the mayor's actions in the past, but his action in the matter of the liquor license, *The Bulletin* commends without reservation. Any man who stands up against the influence of the liquor interest shows that he has plenty of spirit."⁵

SHORT-LIVED TRIUMPH

Soon, however, pressure began to build to return to pre-earthquake standards. "Wise counsel was swept aside, and within a few short weeks permission was given the liquor dealers to reopen their places of business, upon the payment of a considerably higher license than had formerly been paid into the city treasury."⁶

It didn't take long for the results to be evident, results plainly written for future leaders who do not have the courage to confront the liquor problem. An August 22 editorial in the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported: "Crimes of violence have increased so rapidly within the last six weeks and have been of such a peculiarly vicious character... It may be only a coincidence that the beginning of highway robbery in this city immediately followed the opening of the saloons, but that the city was virtually free from such crimes up to July 4th and has been cursed with them since cannot be denied."

LESSONS UNLEARNED

To live by principles of self-denial is always exacting for individuals, nations, and even cities. Yet, God holds public officials responsible for the moral decisions they make on behalf of their citizens, because these decisions involve vital, far-reaching consequences. After the liquor flowed once again, E. G. White warned, "The people of San Francisco must answer at the judgment bar of God for the reopening of the liquor saloons in that city."⁷

In the biblical record of God's dealing with cities and nations, He does not change. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." "...except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Prov. 14:34; Psalm 127:1. And those who do not learn from their past are doomed to repeat it. ❖

*Newspaper quotes are from her research.

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The late Francis A. Soper was an editor and lifelong temperance advocate. For more than 30 years he edited *Listen*, a temperance magazine, landing interviews with famous entertainers, athletes, and U.S. first ladies who were striving to set a worthy example of drug-free living for young people.

At the time of the earthquake, there were more saloon keepers than there were grocers and the liquor industry controlled the city's government.



I WILL COME AGAIN!

Through all the ages, the coming of the Lord has been the hope of His true followers.

The Savior's parting promise to His disciples, that He would come again, lit up their future, filling their hearts with joy and hope, which sorrow could not quench or trials dim. Amid suffering and persecution, the "appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" was the "blessed hope." Titus 2:13.

When the grieving Thessalonian Christians buried their loved ones, who had hoped to live to witness the coming of the Lord, Paul, their teacher, pointed them to the

resurrection, to take place at the Savior's advent. Then the dead in Christ should rise, and together with the living be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. "And so," he said, "shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18.

On rocky Patmos the beloved disciple hears the promise, "Surely I come quickly," and his longing response voices the prayer of the church in all her pilgrimage, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Revelation 22:20.

THE SURETY OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

1. Before Jesus went back to heaven, what promise did He make to His disciples? John 14:3

2. The disciples understood that His coming would mark what point in the world's history? Matthew 24:3

3. At His ascension, what did the angel say would be the manner of His return? Acts 1:9-11

4. To what "blessed hope" did the apostle Paul look forward? Titus 2:13

5. Why is it important for us to know the vital details about how Jesus will come? Matthew 24:24

The Christian's ultimate hope is to see the Lord, for whom we have waited so long, return in the clouds of heaven. In Isaiah 35:4, we are told that our God will come to save us. We look forward to His Second Coming because it holds fulfillment to His promises to save us from this world of sin and woe so that we may forever be with Him in heaven. He will also come to reward every man according to his works, answering our cry for justice. Matthew 16:27.

THE MANNER OF JESUS' SECOND COMING

1. How many people will see Jesus at His Second Coming? Revelation 1:7, Matthew 26:63-64

All eyes will see Jesus appear in the clouds of heaven. Those who pierced Jesus during His crucifixion will be raised briefly to witness His glorious return in the clouds before being laid to sleep in death again to await the resurrection of the wicked after a thousand years.

2. How visible will His appearing be? Matthew 24:27

3. What and whom will Jesus come with? Matthew 16:27; 25:31, Revelation 5:11

4. What shall be heard when Jesus descends? 1 Thessalonians 4:16

5. How did Peter describe the effects of Christ's Second Coming? 2 Peter 3:10

On the heavens:

On earth's elements:

6. What did Jesus say we should do when someone tells us He is coming or has come secretly? Matthew 24:26

The Second Coming of Jesus will be a literal, visible, audible, and glorious event that will not be hidden from any living creature. Psalm 50:3 says that our God shall come and not be silent. This is contrary to the common belief that Christ's return will be a secret event, and the righteous will be taken away to heaven in a secret rapture.

DIFFERENT OUTCOMES FOR THE WICKED AND THE RIGHTEOUS

1. As Jesus descends, what is the first thing that will happen? 1 Thessalonians 4:16

2. Then what happens to the righteous that are alive? 1 Thessalonians 4:17

3. What will be heard as the angels gather together His elect? Matthew 24:31

4. Whether alive or asleep, what will happen to all the righteous when the trumpet sounds? I Corinthians 15:51-52

5. What happens to our mortal and corruptible bodies? I Corinthians 15:53

6. What will the tribes of the earth do when they see Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven? Matthew 24:30

The Bible clearly teaches that the gathering of the saints will not be a quiet event, undertaken stealthily. Instead, the angels will gather the righteous triumphantly, in full view of the wicked who will mourn as they realize their loss and the fact that they are not saved. Jeremiah 8:20; Mark 13:27.

PREPARING FOR THE SECOND COMING

1. What must we do now in order to have confidence before Him at His coming? I John 2:28

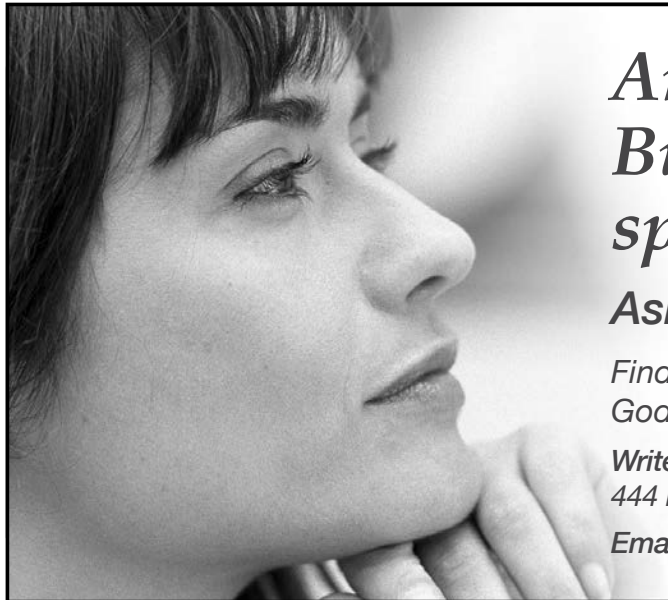
2. What does every man who has the hope of the Second Coming do? I John 3:3

3. Then when Jesus comes, what will we be able to say? Isaiah 25:9

COMMITMENT

I want to be ready to meet the Lord when He comes.
Day by day, I will keep the hope of His glorious soon coming foremost in my mind and let it affect every aspect of my life.

Signed



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Q Before Christ's visible return, will Christians suddenly vanish, leaving the unsaved to seven years of tribulation?

At the beginning of the 21st century, the best-selling Christian book series *Left Behind* was turned into a multi-million block-buster movie. In the movie, millions of Christians suddenly vanish from the planet. Hundreds of thousands of cars are driverless. Newspaper headlines scream: "Millions Vanish!" "Planes Crash, No Pilots!" Confusion and fear take over those left behind.

In the midst of this panic-stricken world, a Romanian, Nicolae Carpathia takes over the United Nations and establishes a one-world government. He makes a covenant to protect the Jews, but 3 ½ years later, he breaks it and desecrates their newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. When he seeks the worship of the whole world, Carpathia becomes the Antichrist of Bible prophecy. But the over-powering Second Coming of Christ ends his seven-year rule of terror.

Wow! What a fascinating portrayal of end-time events! But is this fictitious book, *Left Behind*, biblically sound? To answer that question, we must ask what the foundational beliefs behind this book are. A closer look reveals that it supports the following concepts:

1. A secret rapture, when Christ mysteriously removes Christians before the Antichrist takes over the world for seven years.
2. A second chance for those left behind to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
3. A time of trouble for those left behind. Raptured Christians will only watch from heaven.

Would it surprise you to know that Christians in past centuries read their Bibles very differently? Here is what they believed:

Christians are raptured out of the world at the visible Second Coming of Christ.

There will be no second chance for those unready to meet Christ at His Second Coming. The time to prepare to meet God in peace is now.

Bible prophecy predicts that Christians will face a terrible time of trouble. They will face the mark of the beast, universally forced worship of the beast, an economic boycott and eventually a death decree for noncompliance. See Revelation chapter thirteen.

As you can see, these views are poles apart. The basic difference centers on when Christians are raptured out of this world.

Although the word "rapture" is never used in the Bible, the idea comes from the words "caught up" found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. It reads, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be *caught up* together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

When are we "caught up" with Jesus in the clouds? The answer is found in verse 15: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not precede them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be *caught up* together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air...." 1 Thess. 4:15-17. There is no "secret coming" or "secret rapture." This will be a visible, noisy event. A trumpet sounds. As the dead are resurrected we can imagine them shouting for joy! The righteous call out, "Lo, this is our God, and we have waited for Him!" Isa. 25:9. The wicked cry for the rocks to fall on them, to hide them from the face of Jesus. Rev. 6:15-17.

We invite you to study the Bible lesson in this issue for a clearer understanding of what the Bible actually teaches about the Second Coming of Christ.

Before Christ's visible return, will Christians suddenly vanish, leaving the unsaved to seven years of tribulation?

PREPARATION FOR OUR ETERNAL HOME

If we believe that Jesus is coming soon,
our actions and our words will show it!

BY ELLEN G. WHITE

Do we believe with all the heart that Christ is soon coming and that we are now having the last message of mercy that is ever to be given to a guilty world? Is our example what it should be? Do we, by our lives and holy conversation, show to those around us that we are looking for the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who shall change these vile bodies and fashion them like unto His glorious body? I fear that we do not believe and realize these things as we should. Those who believe the important truths that we profess should act out their faith.

Angels are watching over and guarding us; we often grieve these angels by indulging in trifling conversation, jesting, and joking, and also by sinking down into a careless, apathetic state. Although we may now and then make an effort for the victory and obtain it, yet if we do not keep it, but sink down into the same careless, indifferent state, unable to endure temptations and resist the enemy, we do not endure the trial of our faith that is more precious than

gold. We are not suffering for Christ's sake, and glorying in tribulation.

LONGING FOR THE THINGS OF HEAVEN

The true Christian's joys and consolation must and will be in heaven. The longing souls of those who have tasted of the powers of the world to come and have feasted on heavenly joys, will not be satisfied with things of earth. Such will find enough to do in their leisure moments. Their souls will be drawn out after God. Where the treasure is, there will the heart be, holding sweet communion with the God they love and worship. Their amusement will be in contemplating their treasure—the Holy City, the earth made new, their eternal home. And while they dwell upon those things which are lofty, pure, and holy, heaven will be brought near, and they will feel the power of the Holy Spirit, and this will tend to wean them more and more from the world and cause their consolation and chief joy to be in the things of heaven, their sweet home. The power of attraction to God and heaven will

then be so great that nothing can draw their minds from the great object of securing the soul's salvation and honoring and glorifying God.

As I realize how much has been done for us to keep us right, I am led to exclaim, Oh, what love, what wondrous love, hath the Son of God for us poor sinners! Should we be stupid and careless while everything is being done for our salvation that can be done? All heaven is interested for us. We should be alive and awake to honor, glorify, and adore the high and lofty One. Our hearts should flow out in love and gratitude to Him who has been so full of love and compassion to us. With our lives, we should honor Him, and with pure and holy conversation show that we are born from above, that this world is not our home, but that we are pilgrims and strangers here, traveling to a better country.

AN EYE SINGLE TO HIS GLORY

There is a great lack of Christian fortitude and serving God from principle. We should not seek to please and gratify self, but to honor and

glorify God, and in all we do and say to have an eye single to His glory. If we would let our hearts be impressed with the following important words, and ever bear them in mind, we should not so easily fall into temptation and our words would be few and well chosen: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." "Thou God seest me."

We could not think of these important words, and call to mind the sufferings of Jesus that we poor sinners might receive pardon and be redeemed unto God by His most precious blood, without feeling a holy restraint upon us and an earnest desire to suffer for Him who suffered and endured so much for us. If we dwell on these things, dear self, with its dignity, will be humbled, and its place will be occupied by a childlike simplicity that will bear reproof from others and will not be easily provoked. A self-willed spirit will not then come in to rule the soul.

THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH

Many who profess the name of Christ and claim to be looking for His speedy coming, know not what

it is to suffer for Christ's sake. Their hearts are not subdued by grace, and they are not dead to self, as is often shown in various ways. At the same time, they are talking of having trials. But the principal cause of their trials is an unsubdued heart, which makes self so sensitive that it is often crossed. If such could realize what it is to be a humble follower of Christ, a true Christian, they would begin to work in good earnest and begin right. They would first die to self, then be instant in prayer, and check every passion of the heart.

Give up your self-confidence and self-sufficiency, brethren, and follow the meek Pattern. Ever keep Jesus in your mind that He is your example and you must tread in His footsteps. Look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame. He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. He for our sins was once the meek, slain lamb, wounded, bruised, smitten, and afflicted.

Let us, then, cheerfully suffer something for Jesus' sake, crucify self daily, and be partakers of Christ's sufferings here, that we may be made partakers with Him of His glory, and be crowned with glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life.

What are you doing, brethren, in the great work of preparation? Those

who are uniting with the world are receiving the worldly mould and preparing for the mark of the beast. Those who are distrustful of self, who are humbling themselves before God and purifying their souls by obeying the truth these are receiving the heavenly mould and preparing for the seal of God in their foreheads. When the decree goes forth and the stamp is impressed, their character will remain pure and spotless for eternity.

Now is the time to prepare. The seal of God will never be placed upon the forehead of an impure man or woman. It will never be placed upon the forehead of the ambitious, world-loving man or woman. It will never be placed upon the forehead of men or women of false tongues or deceitful hearts. All who receive the seal must be without spot before God—candidates for heaven. Go forward, my brethren and sisters. I can only write briefly upon these points at this time, merely calling your attention to the necessity of preparation. Search the Scriptures for yourselves, that you may understand the fearful solemnity of the present hour. ❖

Ellen G. White (1827–1915) was a Christian author and speaker whose inspirational writings have been translated worldwide. Excerpted from The Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald, Feb. 17, 1853, and Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, p. 210.



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GRAZERS BEWARE!

When it comes to your health, grazing is out and eating two or three regular meals per day is in!

BY ALEXANDRA I. MOT, PhD

Eating between meals or ‘grazing’ throughout the day is a popular eating habit practiced in many cultures. According to a recent survey, over 90 percent of American adults snack or “graze” on any given day.¹ While some think that eating many small meals per day will help them to lose weight, the opposite is actually true. Recent studies are now showing that eating two or three regular meals per day and avoiding anything in between is optimal—not only for weight loss, but also for the prevention of many chronic diseases!

EAT REGULAR MEALS TO MANAGE WEIGHT

Obesity is one of the leading causes of disability and death in Western countries, therefore maintaining a healthy body weight is important. One study published in the *Journal of Nutrition* followed over 50,000 adults during a seven-year period and found that eating two or three meals per day prevented long-term weight gain compared to eating more than three meals per day which was associated with an increase in body mass index (BMI).²

One could think that those who ate more than three meals per day gained weight simply because they were taking in more calories. However, this idea is not supported by a study that found that eating only breakfast and lunch was better for achieving a healthy body weight than eating the exact same food split into six smaller meals per day.³ This shows that irrespective of

calorie intake the number of meals eaten per day plays an important role in determining body weight.

Even healthy foods which are eaten in between meals can result in body weight gain. One recent study observed that adults who drank orange juice in between meals during a four-week period gained body fat mass, while those who drank the exact same amount of orange juice with three meals per day did not gain body fat mass.⁴

Scientists have now discovered the reason why avoiding snacking helps to maintain a healthy body weight. This is explained by the fact that complete food restriction between meals activates a cleansing system called autophagy in liver, fat, brain, and muscle cells that helps to prevent obesity.⁵

CIRCADIAN RHYTHMS AND MEAL TIMING

The study mentioned earlier from the *Journal of Nutrition* also found that the timing of the largest meal of the day was important for maintaining a healthy body weight. Those who consumed breakfast as the largest meal experienced a significant decrease in BMI, in contrast to those who ate their largest meal at dinner.⁶

Meal timing is important because our bodies function by an internal body clock, also known as our circadian rhythms, which regulate many body functions throughout a 24-hour period. The most well-known

circadian rhythm is the sleep-wake cycle which is synchronized by exposure to daylight. In a similar way, our digestive system is regulated by a circadian clock that determines optimal meal timing. For example, the hormone insulin, which is required for the proper regulation of blood glucose levels is released in the blood at higher levels in response to a meal eaten in the morning when compared to the evening.⁷ This illustrates why eating the largest meal of the day in the morning is optimal.

Many factors can disrupt our circadian clock, leading to obesity. This includes eating too frequently, eating at irregular times each day, or eating at inappropriate times (for example during the night). One study found that those who ate an irregular number of meals each day during a two-week period performed poorly on measures of metabolic health, when compared to those who ate a regular number of meals.⁸ Furthermore, skipping breakfast has been shown to adversely affect specific clock genes resulting in disrupted metabolism that can lead to obesity.⁹

PREVENT CANCER AND COGNITIVE DECLINE

Not eating late at night results in a long overnight fast, which is important for preventing cancer. One study published in the *International Journal of Cancer* surveyed over 4,000 participants and found that not eating during two or more hours before bedtime decreased the risk of developing breast and prostate cancer by 20 percent, when compared to those who ate immediately before going to bed.¹⁰ Overnight fasts of less than 13 hours were shown in a study to be associated with a 36 percent increased risk of cancer recurrence in breast cancer patients.¹¹

Increasing the overnight fast also helps to prevent memory loss in neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's disease.¹² The fasting period increases the survival of newly generated brain cells leading to better mental performance.¹³

OTHER MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

Depression is another common illness affecting millions of people worldwide. Recent studies are now showing that meal timing has a significant impact on mental health.

Overnight fasting has an antidepressant-like effect by increasing the production of a protein called 'brain-derived

neurotrophic factor' in the frontal lobe of the brain.¹⁴ This protein improves mood by providing support to brain cells in the frontal lobe which is the control centre of the brain.

Not eating late at night also improves mental health by improving sleep quality.¹⁵ Eating the last meal of the day at least several hours before bedtime allows the digestion to be completed before going to sleep which is important for getting a good night's rest.

A FINAL THOUGHT

Lastly and perhaps the most important reason for keeping your body in optimal health is because the Bible tells us that "you are the temple of the living God." 2 Cor. 6:16. God desires to be so close to each one of us that He will dwell within us, if we invite Him to. When our mind is clear and our body is in optimal health, we are better able to hear His voice speaking to our souls.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR EATING REGULAR MEALS

- ♦ Eat two or three meals per day without snacking between meals.
- ♦ Eat at regular times each day and allow sufficient time between meals (at least five hours) so that the stomach can rest after each meal.
- ♦ Make breakfast your biggest meal of the day.
- ♦ If you eat dinner, make sure that it is a light meal (consisting of fruits and bread for example) and that it is eaten at least several hours before bedtime so that the digestion is completed before going to sleep. ❖

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Our cellular clocks are set to maintain health when food is eaten earlier in the day, with at least five hours of fasting between meals.



LIFE LINES

Health News You Can Use



WHY DOES COFFEE MAKE ME TIRED?

It has been estimated that over one billion cups of coffee are consumed daily throughout the world, with an average of 3.2 cups per day among US users!

Caffeine, a natural compound in coffee, works by inhibiting adenosine, an inhibitory neurotransmitter which makes us tired, sleepy, and demand rest. It is similar in shape as the adenosine molecules and fits into the adenosine receptors, blocking adenosine. This temporarily creates an energizing stimulant effect. Once the caffeine wears off, adenosine comes back with a vengeance, bringing energy, mood, and performance lower than normal.

Daily caffeine intake creates a chronic neurotransmitter imbalance in the brain so that more adenosine and adenosine receptors are made. More caffeine is therefore needed to plug up the many adenosine receptors, the absence of which leads to severe fatigue due to more adenosine and adenosine receptors needed to detect it. One ends up becoming dependent on caffeine just to function normally. *"Science Says: Coffee Is Secretly Sabotaging Your Energy Levels (Why Does Coffee Make Me Tired?)"*, The Energy Blueprint, theenergyblueprint.com, March 27, 2018.

AMAZING NEW RESEARCH ON THE BENEFITS OF REGULAR SLEEP

A consistent seven to nine-hour sleep each night is the most effective thing we can do to reset our brain and body health.

Plentiful sleep is a powerful tool for controlling your appetite, your weight,

and keeping your body trim. Insufficient sleep is found to be one of the most significant lifestyle factors for the development of Alzheimer's disease.

Five to six hours of sleep per night has been shown to reduce athletic performance while increasing chances for injury across a season by more than 200%. It also compromises the immune system and disrupts blood sugar levels. The risk for cancer, cardiovascular disease, stroke, and congestive heart failure is also significantly increased.

Sleep disruption has further been associated with all major psychiatric conditions, including depression, anxiety, and suicide.

Sum up the above physical and mental health implications, and we can safely conclude that the shorter your sleep, the shorter your life. *"The best thing you can do for your health: sleep well,"* The Guardian, www.theguardian.com, Feb. 9, 2019.

BODY FAT MAY AFFECT YOUR BRAIN VOLUME

A recent study published in Neurology has uncovered an intriguing link between body fat, especially around the abdomen, and the brain.

The scientists found that people with both higher BMI (30 kg/m² or more) and higher waist-to-hip ratio measurements had lower grey matter volume in the brain compared to those who had a high BMI but low waist-to-hip ratio.

A high waist-to-hip ratio, representing visceral fat, has more toxic effects as it surrounds vital abdominal organs. It is known to trigger inflammation that can drive a number of adverse health effects, including increased risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, breathing problems, and conditions like arthritis.

The study shows that staying lean

not only lowers the risk for physical problems, but also helps keep the brain healthy. *"Body Fat May Affect Your Brain Volume, Study Says,"* Time Magazine, time.com, Jan. 9, 2019.

PRENATAL EXPOSURE TO CANNABIS AFFECTS THE DEVELOPING BRAIN

The largest longitudinal studies of children whose mothers smoked marijuana during their pregnancies have revealed that cannabis has gross effects on fetal brain development.

When marijuana is ingested or smoked during pregnancy, exogenous cannabinoids enter the blood and easily cross through the placental barrier. They continue to circulate for up to five days depending on dosage and frequency of use, rendering both efficient and prolonged exposure.

Fetal brain development is especially impacted by cannabis. Prefrontal cortex activity, which is responsible for executive functions and sociability, is reduced, leading to anti-social tendencies, attention deficits, and memory dysfunction; cerebella activity is decreased while pre-motor cortex activation is increased, leading to hyperactivity and impulsivity, especially in females; and the amygdala, which is critical for emotional development, is especially affected in males, resulting in signs of depression, psychotic and schizophrenic-like symptoms in adulthood.

"Prenatal Exposure to Cannabis Affects the Developing Brain,"

The Scientist, www.the-scientist.com, Jan. 1, 2019.



these times

A penetrating look at current events in light of Bible prophecy



“KEEP YOUR OWN TRASH!”

A major shock was felt in the global trash market in 2018 when China, the main recycler of plastic waste closed its doors to accepting imported waste. This left the trash-exporting countries scrambling to redirect their waste elsewhere because it is cheaper for developed countries to outsource their recycling than recycling it at home.

Unwanted trash showed up in parts of South East Asia, where countries like Malaysia reported a fivefold increase in trash, and the Philippines a threefold increase. Much of the trash contained contaminants that had been illegally shipped, and under international law cannot be incinerated or put into landfill. Stalled containers of trash have leaked toxins into local environments, rendering agricultural zones infertile. Where contaminated waste was illegally burned, villages nearby have registered hazardous levels of zinc, iron, and lead in their soil and in close bodies of water.

For too long, wealthy nations have taken advantage of lax environmental regulation in developing countries, but now these countries are pushing back. The Philippines shipped 51 containers of trash back to South Korea in January 2019. Malaysia returned five

containers back to Spain, with plans to return 3,000 more tons.

The issue is severe enough to trigger diplomatic rows between countries. When the Canadians stalled on promises to deal with their contaminated trash illegally shipped to the Philippines, President

Duterte finally sent the trash back to Canada in 69 cargo ships and threatened to dump them in Canadian waters should they refuse it.

The only way to curb this global trash problem is to produce less trash, especially plastic. And forcing wealthy nations to confront their own trash problems will most likely be the only motivation to do so.

“Southeast Asia Doesn't Want to Be the World's Dumping Ground. Here's How Some Countries Are Pushing Back,” Time, www.time.com, June 3, 2019.

God is saddened when the strong take advantage of the weak or when the planet is trashed with hazardous materials. One day God will recreate the earth without the blight of sin, toxins, or toxic people. Rev. 21:5. Until then, we can seek the best alternatives available, being mindful that this earth is not our home. “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” Rom. 8:22.

SEX WITH CHILDREN IS AMERICA'S DIRTY SECRET

Elementary and middle-school aged children, both male and female, are bought and sold for sex in America. They experience rape, frequent beatings, drugging, being filmed for the sale of pornography,

and other gruesome atrocities.

Selling sex with underage children “has become big business in America, and is now the fastest growing business in organized crime and the second most-lucrative commodity traded illegally after drugs and guns,” writes John Whitehead of the Rutherford Institute, one of the nation’s leading advocates of civil liberties and human rights.

Amy Fine Collins, an investigative reporter specializing in sex trafficking found that criminals view selling malleable teens as safer and more lucrative than selling drugs or guns, because a young girl can be sold 10–15 times a day—and a pimp confiscates 100 percent of her earnings.

The statistics are grim: “Every two minutes, a child is exploited in the sex industry, adults purchase children for sex at least 2.5 million times a year in the United States, and young girls . . . are sold to 50 men each day for \$25 apiece, while their handlers make \$150,000 to \$200,000 per child each year.”

Who buys a child for sex? “They could be your co-worker, doctor, pastor or spouse,” writes journalist Tim Swarens, who spent more than a year investigating the sex trade in America.

This moral epidemic did not happen overnight. “We have been sexualized for years in music videos, on billboards, in television ads, and in clothing stores,” Whitehead observes. *“The Essence of Evil: Sex with Children Has Become Big Business in America,”* Global Research, www.globalresearch.ca, April 24, 2019.

The Bible predicted that just before the return of Jesus Christ, “evil men and seducers would wax

“What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Matthew 24:3



worse and worse...” 2 Tim. 3:13; and “because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. Matt. 24:12. That time is upon us.

IN TRANSGENDER REALITY, FEELINGS RULE

On April 8, 2019 in Canada, Bill Whatcott, a Christian, was charged \$55,000 by a human rights tribunal for calling the politician Morgane Oger (born Ronan Oger), a “biological male” in a political pamphlet. Oger is a “transgender woman” who was disturbed by the act of Whatcott’s “misgendering.” Whatcott was brought to the court for harming the “dignity, feelings and self-respect” of Oger. The judge did not allow Bill Whatcott to show proof of Morgane Oger’s biological gender. “Evidence is simply not relevant to the legal issue...,” were the words of the judge who observed the case.

Not limited to Canadian tribunals, in New York City, if someone in the workplace “misgenders” an individual, they can be charged with

fining up to \$250,000. The spread of transgender politics, where only the feelings of a person are considered valid and biological evidence is inadmissible, is coming to a city near you. “*The Horrifying Evidence: Jordan Peterson Was Right About Transgender Totalitarianism*,” Fulcrum 7, www.fulcrum7.com, April 16, 2019.

As in the days of Lot, humankind is losing an objective standard of morality, and therefore reality. And also as in Lot’s day, the blindness from an impenetrable darkness caused by abandoning the rule of law for the rule of feelings is descending over society’s collective thinking.

Let us continue looking to Jesus as our light in this darkening world and cling to the sure promises of His Word to return for the deliverance of His people.

WORLD’S RIVERS AWASH WITH ANTIBIOTICS

The largest global study on antibiotic pollution has revealed alarmingly high levels of antibiotic concentrations in rivers worldwide, as high as 300 times above safe levels! Tests at 711 sites on rivers in 72 countries found antibiotics in 65 percent of them. The drugs enter rivers and soil through leaks from wastewater treatment plants and drug manufacturing facilities, and animal and human waste.

Of the European rivers tested, the Danube had the highest level of antibiotic pollution. The Thames, considered one of Europe’s

cleanest rivers, had a mixture of five antibiotics with Ciprofloxacin at three times above safe levels. In a river in Bangladesh, metronidazole, a common antibiotic used to treat vaginal infections, was found at more than 300 times above the safe level.

Prof. William Gaze, a microbial ecologist at the University of Exeter specializing in antimicrobial resistance says that many of the human disease-causing bacteria get their drug-resistant genes from bacteria impacted by these polluted rivers.

The UN reported in April 2019 that “the rise in antibiotic-resistant bacteria is a global health emergency that could kill ten million people by 2050.” “*World’s rivers ‘awash with dangerous levels of antibiotics*,” The Guardian, www.theguardian.com, May 26, 2019.

One of the signs of the last days is the emergence of pestilences. Matt. 24:7. We can do our part to prevent deaths due to antibiotic resistance by taking care of our personal health, minimizing our personal use of antibiotics, and encouraging others to do the same.



SKYSCRAPERS OF THE AFRICAN SAVANNA

What can we learn from the tallest mammal on earth?

BY JOY INYELE

I recently had the blessing of visiting the Maasai Mara Conservancy, a massive expanse of grassy wilderness in southwestern Kenya. Dotted with occasional acacia trees, shrubs, and thousands of animals; this national reserve is home to caroling birds, ferocious hunters, and vigilant grazers.

But above the grasslands tower the giraffes, quietly browsing on the leaves and buds of the acacia treetops. Beautiful in their parched coat and elegant in their long stride, these gentle giants of the savanna are known to be the tallest mammals on earth! Females reach 14 ft. in height, while males can reach 18 ft.

Everything about the giraffe is long: from the half-inch eyelashes that adorn their graceful eyes, to the 20-inch tongue that plucks tasty morsels from thorny acacia branches. Their six-ft legs are equalized by a six-ft neck, supporting a relatively small and craggy head that showcase a peaceful and friendly face.

It is this pillar of neck and head that captivates me most. Like most mammals, including humans, giraffes have seven cervical vertebrae; but giraffe vertebrae are supersized, measuring up to 11 inches long. Looking at them, I can't help but think of the famous quote; "the longest distance on earth is the distance between our heads and our hearts." Oh, so true for the giraffe!

What does it take for the heart to supply a giraffe's brain with blood against gravity for such a long distance? How are they able to compensate for such anatomy?

The answer is found in the thick and powerful ventricular muscles of their 11-kg (24-lb) heart, housed behind those robust shoulders. The giraffe has the biggest heart of any land mammal, which can pump up to 60 liters of blood per minute at a blood pressure twice that of an average man! Giraffes are simply large hearted!

In the giraffe, I begin to understand the

implications for the 18-inch distance between my own brain and heart. The disconnect that we all have—at least at some point in our lives—between what we know, how we feel, and how we act.

As a Christian, it is even more significant to recognize that my knowledge of the Christian faith is often quite cerebral. Knowing the truth and what God requires of me is one thing, but living it is another thing altogether. To link our mind with our actions takes some heart-work; engaging our deepest feelings with reason, which spurs us to make decided changes in our lifestyle.

We, too, need a large and strong strong heart—a heart that will so cherish the truth that our whole character will be molded after it. But our hearts are weak and often calloused through repeated violation of the conscience. Our promises to reform are as ropes of sand. We need "to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith." Eph. 3:15. Then we can rejoice with the psalmist and say, "God is the strength of my heart." Psalm 73:26.

In the Bible, God promises to give us new hearts that will keep His laws, the greatest of which is to love the Lord with all our heart, mind and strength. Then we will delight to do His will, for His law will be in our hearts. Psalm 40:8. ❖

Joy Inyele is a native of Kenya who studies Christian publications management at Hartland College and is an editorial assistant with Last Generation magazine.



A TIME FOR WAR



The devil is accelerating his efforts to destroy young people; we must redouble our efforts to save them.

Today, I am reminded of a summer 39 years ago when I served as a church youth director. By summer's end, I realized I had fallen in love with the job. I was a nurse adding a second degree in health education. My main focus had been adults. But now, I felt God calling me to a higher work—encouraging young people to dedicate their lives to Him, a calling I had never before considered. I accepted that call and it has been my primary focus and greatest joy.

The memory of this call returned vividly today as a series of young people knocked on my door—some hungry for fellowship, others to say goodbye as they start ministry. All have needed extended support beyond their own families (or lack of them) to surmount life's hurdles. Some come from serious dysfunctional backgrounds. Others have weathered a personal crisis of faith. Some struggle with depression.

The devil has a strategic reason to sabotage their lives. This is because 98 percent of those who accept Jesus as their personal Savior do so before the age of 30, and two thirds of these before the age of 14.¹ Sadly, the odds that anyone age 30 and above will chose to follow Jesus are slim. The noise of family dysfunction, depression, addictions, and abusive relationships distorts and diminishes the voice of Jesus calling to their hearts. Popular entertainment offers them momentary pleasure, but its dark and twisted themes only leaves them in deeper despair.

And if young people destroy themselves, it serves the devil's purposes even better. Globally, suicide was the 2nd leading cause of death for ages 15–29 in 2018.² It was the same for Americans, ages 15–34 in 2015.³ Among Americans, the “prevalence of suicidal thoughts, suicidal planning, and suicide attempts is significantly higher among adults aged 18–29 than among adults aged 30+.”⁴

While there are many reasons why young people commit suicide, those who feel their opinions matter are more likely to confide their anxieties and dark thoughts. Here's where caring Christians can make a difference. Research shows that if a struggling young person has just one caring, stable adult mentor in their life, they were more emotionally resilient and less prone to risky behavior. They were far less likely to break the law, succumb to negative peer pressure, or abuse drugs. They were also more likely to succeed in school.⁵

Mentors who made the most impact showed authentic support for young people as individuals, especially when they had self-doubts and needed encouragement. They were active listeners who took time to help them think critically. They pushed them gently towards goals. They lent their perspective and fostered decision making skills.⁶

Because he knows his time is short, the devil is accelerating his efforts to destroy young people. We must not be passive in the face of this onslaught. On behalf of Jesus, who paid an infinite sacrifice for each young person, we must redouble our efforts to make a difference in the life of even one.

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*Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an
example of the believers, in word, in conversation,
in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

1 Timothy 4:12

