

Inside Life

A golden balance scale is positioned in the center of the image. It has two pans hanging from a horizontal beam, which is supported by a vertical post. The scale is resting on an open book with white pages. The background is a solid, warm brown color.

Does God
Have
Favourites?

Start Living
in Prime Time

Child of Destiny

The Church
That Changed

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Inside Life

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Inside Life is a magazine of understanding. Rather than just reporting on life, **Inside Life** seeks to delve inside the marvellous mystery that is life, to discover what it is all about. What does life mean? Where did it come from? How can we make the most of it?

Inside Life provides insight and answers to life's deep questions and challenges, and aims to provide articles of lasting hope, help, and encouragement for successful living in today's fast-moving world.

Inside Life is published three times a year, free of charge, as a community service.
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ISSN: 1177-3693

Our Cover: A pair of scales is a measuring instrument symbolising fairness, equality and justice. It is fair to expect that if there is an almighty God, he should be the epitome of justice and equity. But it doesn't seem that way if millions of people he created are consigned to hell without even having a chance to know about him. Our lead article asks whether God is fair to everybody—or does he have favourites?

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Will Everyone Have a Chance?

Does God Have Favourites?

By Rex Morgan

Most Christians say that the only way to salvation and everlasting life is to believe in Jesus Christ.

But what about people living in parts of the world where they never so much as even hear the name 'Jesus Christ' in their lifetime? What about babies who die before they get a chance to learn about anything, let alone Jesus? Or people with severe learning disabilities preventing them from understanding the meaning of the word 'Jesus'? How about people born into non-Christian religions, or to parents who are atheists? They are not likely to learn about Jesus, at least in any positive way.

Clearly there are multiple millions of people who have gone through their lives without even hearing the words 'Jesus' or 'Christ', let alone being offered the choice of believing in him or not. If Jesus is the only route to everlasting life, it would seem logical that a majority of people who have ever lived must miss out.

Is God fair?

Does God have favourites?

It sure seems that way, since geography and culture play a big part in whether you hear about Jesus or not. How can God expect people



'The Last Judgement' by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, Rome depicts the final judgement described in the Bible. Is this the time that people who have never believed in Jesus will be consigned to some sort of hell?

who have never even heard of Jesus Christ to believe in him?

Looking at the Bible

Actually, the Biblical answer to this question is widely misunderstood, even by many Christians. It is indeed true that the Bible says, speaking of Jesus: 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved'.¹

Many Christians have concluded this means that if people don't profess belief in Jesus before their death, they will be consigned to some kind of hell. When you think of all those who haven't even heard of Jesus' name, this appears to be blatantly unfair. How does it stack up with a kind, merciful and loving God who urges us to be ever ready to forgive people and to love our enemies?

Probably the most widely quoted verse in the entire Bible claims: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life'.² The next verse goes on to say: 'For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him'.

This is saying that Jesus came to earth to save the world, not just a small group of people who follow him because they are somehow lucky enough to know about him.

Many other Bible passages emphasise a loving God's earnest desire to save all of mankind. For instance God says he 'wants all people to be saved'³ and that Jesus Christ 'gave himself as a ransom for all people'.⁴ Another verse says: 'He is patient with you, not wanting anyone



*How many of these people have had a chance to believe in Jesus? (from top left, clockwise)
Worshippers at Tirta Empul Temple in Bali; Japanese commuters at Shinagawa train station, Tokyo;
Buddhist monks praying in Myanmar; a crowd at Picadilly Circus, London.*

to perish, but everyone to come to repentance'.⁵

How come this isn't happening? Millions of people live and die without so much as hearing the name of Jesus. Comparatively few people come to repentance, certainly far short of God's desire for 'everyone' to do this. Is God doing a lousy job?

Not the Right Time

The answer is that God is all-powerful and well able to bring the whole world to repentance, and he really wants to, but he is not doing this right now. The Bible shows that he has a timetable, a plan, and now is not the time that he is seeking to have the whole world aware of his presence.

A number of Bible passages point this out. For example: 'God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all'.⁶

This statement attests that the world is presently free to live in opposition to God—evidenced by injustice, violence, and crime—but this is a temporary state. A time is coming in the future when God will show mercy to everyone.

It is well known that the Bible predicts a time when everybody who has ever lived will be resurrected⁷ and judged.⁸ What will that judgement be like?

There are lots of indications in the Bible that it won't be nearly as fearsome and devastating as many people think. Mercy and forgiveness

are central qualities of God's nature.⁹ So we can rest assured he is not going to consign people to some kind of hell for innocently failing to believe in a Jesus they have never even heard about!

The Apostle Paul referred to this when he said: 'God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them'.¹⁰ Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, not just a 'righteous' minority.

Paul affirmed very clearly that: 'God does not show favouritism'.¹¹ The context of this declaration was that the early church, composed at that time exclusively of Jews, was shocked by the fact that God

was calling non-Jews to join them. The non-Jews, known as 'Gentiles', were despised by a majority of the Jews who felt they were the only people in a special relationship with God. Surely God couldn't be saving those 'heathen reprobates'!

But God showed very clearly at that time that he didn't have favourites, as he began to draw numerous Gentiles to believe in Jesus. God is much more merciful and even-handed than humans are. Just as he surprised the church by helping the Gentiles back then, so he has the capacity to surprise us by welcoming people who haven't heard of Jesus in this lifetime.¹²

Paul pointed out that Gentiles, even though they had never known God's laws, were still capable of obeying

them.¹³ He added that the biblical patriarch Abraham, who lived millennia before Jesus, was nevertheless saved.¹⁴ Abraham responded to the level of revelation about God that he had received. If it is necessary to know the name of Jesus Christ in order to be saved, then Moses, Joshua, Ruth, David, Isaiah, and other Old Testament heroes who lived before the birth of Jesus wouldn't have a chance!

But Jesus died for the sins of every human ever to live. Since his death by crucifixion availed for believers who died in ignorance of the cross in the centuries before Christ, surely it can likewise avail for people who don't know about the cross after the earthly life of Christ. That is an argument made by noted Christian writer Michael Green, who comments: 'The whole Bible makes it plain that men will be judged by God with utter fairness and they will be judged by their response to such light as they have had'.¹⁵ What is important to God is the attitude of the heart rather than the amount of religious knowledge people have.

Not Our Place to Judge

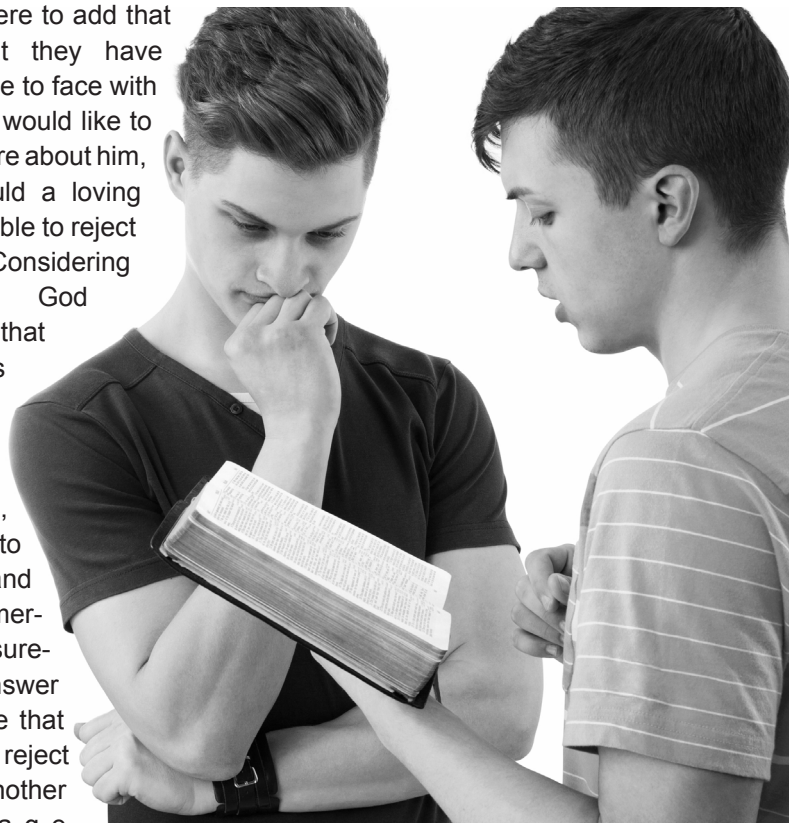
After Paul said, as quoted above, that at a future date: 'God will have mercy on all',¹⁶ he went on to say that God's wisdom is amazingly deep and rich, and his judgements are unsearchable.¹⁷ So we don't know the details, but we do know that he is a generous God of mercy and love, as exemplified by Jesus, and he will be absolutely kind and fair to everybody. He is the very epitome of true justice, because he knows the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

Paul went on to say that everybody will stand before God's judgement seat, and 'each of us will give an account of ourselves to God'.¹⁸ At this time of judgement millions of people will truthfully be able to account to God that they never knew he existed.

If they were to add that now that they have come face to face with him they would like to know more about him, how would a loving God be able to reject them? Considering that God reveals that he is 'gracious, compassionate, slow to anger and full of mercy',¹⁹ surely the answer has to be that he won't reject them! Another passage notes: '...all his ways are just, a faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he'.²⁰ The Bible abounds with similar descriptions of the perfect, righteous, holy character of a kind and generous God who loves us more deeply than we can comprehend.

The overall point Paul was making in this passage is that we ought to refrain from judging others, and leave that up to God.²¹ How can we tell if someone will be saved? It's not up to us. God is the judge. So let's leave it to him and not jump to the conclusion that billions of people will perish forever because they have never heard of Jesus. Let God be the judge of that, and be ready for some surprises!

One noted missionary who decided to leave the judging to God was Dr Lesslie Newbigin, a theologian and author who spent close to 40 years as a missionary in India, from 1936 to 1974. Dr Newbigin was confronted by the fact that only a tiny part of India's teeming population was Christian. What was going to happen to all the others? If he and



God's mercy is not dependent of the competence of humans in bringing 'lost souls' to Jesus.

his fellow missionaries didn't reach them, would they all die eternally because of that? Dr Newbigin concluded that the questions 'Who is going to be saved?', and 'How?' are for God alone to answer.

The belief that all people either come to Jesus in this life or they are consigned to hell forever causes some Christians to be very forceful in their evangelistic efforts. They pursue the goal of bringing 'lost souls' to Jesus with extreme zeal, as if people's salvation depended on them reaching their targets before they die. But God won't consign people to condemnation just because a missionary didn't reach them with the gospel before their death. God's grace isn't geared to the competence of humans in evangelism. He isn't dependent on human works.

Does this mean there is no need for evangelism now? Far from it! Jesus commanded his disciples to go out and preach the gospel to all the world.²² The book of Acts records how the early Christians went out evangelising because Jesus told

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them to, not because they thought anyone they didn't reach would go to hell.

The 'thief on the cross' is a prime example of God's grace extended to someone who hadn't known Jesus. The two criminals crucified with Jesus had most likely been scoundrels for many years. One of them admitted they deserved the death penalty they were receiving.²³ But when he expressed belief in Jesus in his dying moments, he received a personal promise of mercy.²⁴

The parable of the prodigal son can also be called the parable of the waiting father, or even the prodigal (lavishly generous) father. It depicts God as a father so filled with compassion that he willingly forgives a wild and wayward son who had recklessly disowned his family. This is the overwhelming love of the God who was willing to die so that humans could be saved. Would a God of that much love really let people die in hell without giving them a chance?

Salvation for All?

It is important to note that this is not to say that all people will be saved

regardless of whether they are good or bad.²⁵ Just as all people will have an opportunity to accept salvation through Jesus, the other side of the coin means that all people will have an opportunity to refuse that salvation.

God gifted humans with free moral agency, the ability to exercise free will and free choice. That's why the world is the way it is. The fact that God 'does not show favouritism'²⁶ means everyone will have the choice of following him or not. If there are people who have the opportunity to follow Jesus but still don't want to do so, it will be merciful for God to exclude them from eternal life with him, as they will simply be miserable if they have to be where he is. Renowned author C.S. Lewis put it this way:

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done'. All that are in hell choose it. Without that self-choice, there could be no hell.²⁷

In summary, the Bible shows that God does not play favourites. He

deeply loves every human being who has ever lived. It is inherent in his holy, just, compassionate, and merciful character that he will make fair and just provision for everyone to have an opportunity to accept salvation.

The Christian gospel is indeed good news for all of humanity!

Notes

- ¹ Acts 4:12
- ² John 3:16-17
- ³ 1 Timothy 2:4
- ⁴ 1 Timothy 2:6
- ⁵ 2 Peter 3:9
- ⁶ Romans 11:32
- ⁷ John 5:28
- ⁸ Revelation 20:13
- ⁹ Psalms 145:8-9
- ¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:19
- ¹¹ Romans 2:11 ; Acts 10:34-35
- ¹² Romans 10:20; Isaiah 65:1
- ¹³ Romans 2:14-15
- ¹⁴ Romans 4:9
- ¹⁵ Michael Green, *You Must Be Joking!*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1991, p. 54.
- ¹⁶ Romans 11:32
- ¹⁷ Romans 11:33
- ¹⁸ Romans 14:10-12
- ¹⁹ Psalm 86:15
- ²⁰ Deuteronomy 32:4
- ²¹ Romans 14:13
- ²² Matthew 28:19-20
- ²³ Luke 23:40-41
- ²⁴ Luke 23:43
- ²⁵ This is a belief known as 'universalism' or 'universal salvation'.
- ²⁶ Romans 2:11
- ²⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, chapter 9.



Rex Morgan, the editor of Inside Life, and his wife Marilyn live on Auckland's North Shore. Rex has worked in Christian ministry and office admin-

istration for over 30 years and has contributed articles to a number of international publications.

Start Living in *Prime Time*

By Denis Waitley

Primetime is that period between 6 and 10 p.m. during which most of the general public watches television. Commercials in prime time are the most expensive, costing many thousands of dollars per minute. Your real success in life will take a quantum leap when you stop watching other people making money in their professions performing in prime time, and start living your own dreams and goals in prime time. Time is the ultimate equal opportunity employer. Time never stops to rest, never hesitates, never looks forward or backward. Life's raw material spends itself in the now, this moment, which is why how you spend your time is far more important than all the material possessions you may own or positions you may obtain. Positions change. Possessions come and go. You can earn more money. You can renew your supply of many things. But like good health, that other most precious resource, time spent is gone forever.

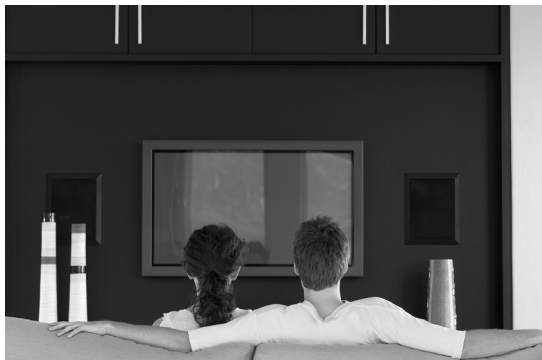
Each yesterday, and all of them together, are beyond your control. Literally all the money in the world can't undo or redo a single act you performed. You cannot erase a single word you said. You can't add an 'I love you', 'I'm sorry', or 'I forgive you', not even a 'thank you' you forgot to say. Each human being in every hemisphere and time zone has precisely 168 hours a week to spend. And some of those most precious hours occur in prime time.

Consider this: most of your daytime hours are likely spent helping other people solve their problems.

The little time you have in the evenings and on weekends is all you have to spend on yourself, on your own dreams and goals, and personal development. Some thoughts to ponder:



- Have dinner with your loved ones at least two to three times per week. It's the best time for casual conversation to listen to what those close to you feel is important in their lives.



Mealtimes are a time to dialogue.

- A television set is an appliance. It should be used, at most, for two



hours at a time. It should be off, unless specific programs of interest are selected. It should not be used as a one-eyed babysitter. For the most part, TV exposes us to negative role models.

- Instead of watching television, why not read a good fiction or nonfiction book, write a letter, engage in a hobby or craft, call a friend or someone in need of encouragement on the phone, network on your computer, go out to an ethnic restaurant, a home show, an entrepreneurial show, a musical recital, a play, a fitness class, or cultural event. Take an art or photography class. Use prime time to live the kind of life others put on layby.

Action Idea: If you and your family/friends watch TV, try not turning it on for one week. When you do watch TV, reduce by 50% the amount of time you spend watching it. Concentrate your evenings and free time into hands-on, real-life experiences you can touch, feel, smell, and engage all your senses in. Instead of virtual reality, insist on the real thing!

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Ten Special Offers at Your Local Church

By Roy Lawrence

Let's face it. It's not very fashionable to go to church today. That is not to say that people do not have some sort of belief in God. According to opinion polls most people say that they do. In fact the majority think of themselves as religious. But going to church is something else. We might perhaps go to a carol service at Christmas or turn up from time to time at a wedding, christening, or funeral. But as for ordinary, run-of-the-mill, bread-and-butter, week-by-week church services, that's something different.

After all, if we turn on the television, we often find that regular churchgoers are pictured as wimps or bigots or both. And we don't want to appear like that, do we? So the average weekend does not include a visit to the local church.

However, the majority does not always get things right. The government is keen that we should know the majority diet is at present an unhealthy one—and we have the heart attacks to prove it. And although for generations a massive number of people have been smokers, that does not make smoking good for us. And our current rejection of traditional sexual morality has not served us well. The escalation of sexually transmitted diseases shows this clearly. The majority can sometimes make horrible mistakes. Sometimes it is better not to go with the flow.

So before you and I go with the flow—in the opposite direction to our local church—let's just stop for a moment and ponder. Could we be missing out on something of real value?

Before I sat down to write this article three pamphlets dropped through our letterbox. They were from local supermarkets, and in glowing and glossy colours they contained details of their special offers. Pamphlets like these come to us regularly, and I sometimes find myself wishing that the churches were rich enough to send something similar. You see, I do believe that the churches have special offers which make the supermarkets pale into insignificance.

Here then are some of the offers currently available at the church down your road—my own 'top-ten' selection. If you and I are interested in living life to the full, they really are too good to ignore.

1. Friendship: There are a lot of lonely people in the world. A newspaper editor has written: 'Every time loneliness is mentioned in any part of the paper, letters arrive literally by the dozen from people who are lonely'. They come from the young, the old, and in-between. Those who write them may be doing quite well

at work. They may not be short of worldly goods. But in spite of that they are finding themselves short of flesh-and-blood relationships.

Yet nobody needs to be lonely: friendships can be found in the church down the road. Of course the people there will not be perfect, but one of the reasons they are there at all is that they believe that to love your neighbour as yourself is a good basis for life. That is why millions of good friendships have been made in churches around the world. Speaking personally it was in church that I met my wife, my best friend of all.

2. Self-awareness: This is one of the church's special offers which we may not find quite so attractive, for there is a dark side to human nature, which we would rather ignore. It is true that we will hear in church that all human beings are sinners, that we all break God's laws, that we all need his forgiveness. But we will also hear that each one of us is uniquely precious in his sight. Self-contempt



Millions of good friendships have been made in churches around the world.

has no place in Christian character. Churches teach us to value and respect ourselves.

3. Good news about God: Christian self-respect and self-value rests upon three fundamental truths about God, which we will hear again and again in church:

- God made us—he does not create rubbish;
- God loves us—the cross of Jesus shows us just how much; and
- God wants us—he has something quite unique for each one of us to do and to be.

The world can seem a frightening place, but because of these three truths churches can help us achieve a new personal significance and security.

4. Worship: The person who does not worship lives in a room surrounded by mirrors, many of them distorting mirrors. It is a room in which space is confined, the light is dim, and the air is dank. If we would break out into sunshine and freedom, we need to become aware of that which is greater than ourselves. We need to reach out in worship towards our Creator. Of course we do not have to be in church in order to pray. But it is a sad fact of life that our prayer-life can all too easily wither away, unless churchgoing is motivating us to make it a regular and healthy habit. Worshiping in our local church can help us to keep



Some churches throw a big party on Christmas Day for people who would otherwise have been alone and unhappy.

right with God, to get right with each other, and to come closer to achieving our own true nature.

5. Time to reflect: You can find wisdom in some unexpected places. For instance how about these words right at the beginning of A. A. Milne's children's book *Winnie-the-Pooh*?

Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump on the back of his head behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but he sometimes feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think about it.

In this world of stress and pressure the opportunity provided by an hour in church to stop bumping and start thinking can be very precious.

6. A chance to help others: There really is very little fun in being totally turned in on ourselves. Life is better if we care about others. Every church provides opportunities for service. Those who take these opportunities find in them an important part of happy, balanced living. For instance in my last church we had the practice of throwing a big party on Christmas Day for people who would otherwise

have been alone and unhappy. Many of the people's names were provided for us by the local Social Services. Year after year our guests told us what a good time they had, but also again and again the helpers said that serving others made their own Christmas complete. They felt quite sorry for some of their neighbours who just sat at home, over-eating and over-drinking, and often falling out with the family!

7. A meeting with Jesus: Here is something deeply mysterious. We have a promise from Jesus: 'Where two or three gather together in my name, there am I in the midst.'¹ If you believe that Jesus does not tell us lies, then it follows that coming together with like-minded people to worship in the name of Christ makes it possible to reach out to him and experience his life-transforming presence.

8. A place of healing: If we experience anything at all of the reality of the presence of Jesus in our worship, the Church's ministry of healing must follow naturally and logically. He was always 'infectious' with wholeness, and when people were in his presence, they encountered a power for healing. So if we truly can



meet him today, we should not be surprised if we are better in body, mind, and spirit for that meeting. Logically we should be surprised if he makes



Jesus has promised to be wherever two or three gather for worship in his name...

no difference at all! As I sit here writing, I can think of scores of people—even hundreds, if I put my mind to it—who have been changed whilst worshipping in church. I can think of relationships healed, of peace discovered, of mental and physical health improved, and even of supposedly incurable diseases and disabilities which have unaccountably been taken away.

9. New goals and directions: As part of this healing experience, it is not uncommon to find that regular worship in church brings a new sense of purpose into life. God has a plan for each one of us. It will be a tragic waste if you and I fail to do and to be what we were meant for, but it is so easy to fail to hear his call to us in matters both great and small, unless we take time out with God.

10. The offer of eternal life: One of these days we are going to die. What then? The Bible says there can be a place, a purpose, a destiny for us beyond this world. But have we actually listened to the Christian message of eternal life? Do we know what it means that 'God so loved

the world that he gave his only-begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life?'² It is a major function of the church in our neighbourhood to make the meaning of those words clear. Any one of us can go along and ask the vicar, the priest, the minister, or the pastor to explain this message. Your church has the potential to be the gate of heaven!

So how's that for a list of special offers? You don't have to seek out some mega-church with a congregation of thousands to find any of them. There will probably be less than a hundred worshippers at your local church if you call in this weekend. But that's all right. Jesus

promised to be in the midst when two or three meet in his name. He does not require two or three hundred, let alone two or three thousand.

Of course you may have to work at getting the best out of your local church. The same would be true of joining a local health club or any other organisation. Even at the supermarket you can miss the best offers if you don't take care. As far as the church is concerned, the offers are so spectacularly far-reaching that they certainly merit attention. The only way to find out whether they are genuine is to go and see for yourself. None of it may be fashionable just at present. But then, Jesus never said: 'Follow the fashion'; he said: 'Follow me!'



whether in a small country parish church that might barely hold a hundred,



or a mega-church that seats several thousands.

Notes

- 1 Matthew 18:20
- 2 John 3:16

Canon Roy Lawrence has spent most of his life in the ministry working in Anglican churches in the North of England, as well as serving as a hospital chaplain. A well-known Christian writer and broadcaster, Roy has authored fourteen books.

Have You Cleaned Out Your **DESPISERY?**

By Joanna D'Costa

Do we have a place in our minds which is occupied by people we dislike—people who have caused us harm, imaginary or real—people whom we enviously have distaste for because they seem to have been 'lucky' in getting their lives together, while we haven't? People we dislike because we cannot get along with them? After all they are not our type.

Let me relate to you a story I read some time ago. There was a man who enjoyed possession of a good share of the world's goods, but for some reason or other went around glum faced and irritable most of the time. Working for the man was a cheerful old Negro whose toothless grin spread from ear to ear, day in and day out. He was perpetually happy, this hired hand.

Calling the happy servant to him one day, the man asked: 'Mose, you haven't a dime to your name, and if it were not for the little jobs I give you, I don't know what would become of you. Now tell me, how can you go around looking so happy all the time?'

The old man rolled his eyes, wrinkled his brow, scratched the top of his head, and then his broad grin bloomed again: 'I dunno boss', he said, 'less it's 'cause I ain't got

nobody in my despisery. I don't hate nobody'.

His grim-faced employer nodded and walked away to think. Yes, he did have a number of people in his despisery. They deserved to be there too, but the

strange fact was that it was hurting him more than it was hurting them. The poison of anger surged through his system and his mouth tightened. His vision was distorted by the fury aroused through his frequent inspections of the prisoners in his despisery.

The toothless old man had the right idea. He refused to nurse along memories of folks he did not like. He banished them so completely that each night he slept well and most peacefully, and each morning he could wake up with a fresh smile, a smile that lasted the whole day.

What Is a Despisery?

I had never heard the word 'despisery' before reading this story, but I believe I do like it. Just as we would keep count of how much money we have in our treasury, we need to figure out how many people we have in our





Not all poisons are kept in sealed bottles on pharmacy shelves.

despisery. Our treasury we fill, but our despisery, which is filled with people we despise, we empty.

The Bible tells us that if we despise someone, we sin.¹ When we sin, we hurt ourselves more than we hurt others.² The Bible also tells us to put away all bitterness and anger,³ to quit 'biting and devouring each other' in hatred, lest we destroy each other.⁴ It also tells us that if we hate, we live in darkness.⁵

Not all poisons are kept in sealed bottles on pharmacy shelves. All cases of strange illness are not due to poisonous pollution or pesticides. The commonest, deadliest, and most dreadful of poisons are those we carry around with us—in our hearts. The poison of anger and hate can produce a deadly effect. It is the cause of many physical ailments, but more importantly it can destroy us inwardly.

Let's clean our despisery: throw out all its contents and let the light of goodwill overflow its dark corners.

How to Empty Your Despiser

I had an old neighbour that lived in a house just across the street from my home. She would spend a lot of time near her front gate greeting every passerby. If the passerby stopped to talk, she could speak for hours to that person. No harm in that except that her voice was loud, discordant, and very irritating to me. I rarely talked to her and she became one of the prisoners in my despisery. I found it hard not to despise her, and eventually I hit on an idea. I went over and talked to her. After a while I learnt that she was lonely and needed someone to talk to, so she filled the void by greeting and talking to anyone she met on the street. She had no idea that her voice was irritating to others.

When I got to know her and realised her difficulties, I could not help but like her and I was surprised that her loud voice did not disturb me anymore.

A few years later she sold her house as she was too old to look after it,

and went to live with her married daughter in another town. Surprise of surprises I actually missed her voice, and the street I live in seemed to have become too quiet.

Our minds are very powerful. With help from God and some effort on our part, we can alter our attitude to someone or something to such an extent that even the worst of our despisery prisoners can be set free. In releasing these prisoners we will be doing ourselves and others a big favour.

If you know of other ways of emptying your despisery, you would be doing a service to all of us in sharing them with us. Your story could be published in a future issue of *Inside Life*.

Notes

- 1 Proverbs 14:21, Galatians 5:19
- 2 Proverbs 26:27, Galatians 6:7-8
- 3 Ephesians 4:31
- 4 Galatians 5:15
- 5 1 John 2:9-11

Child of Destiny

By Joseph Tkach

Last July, the whole world took notice when Prince George was born in England. He is said to be 'the Child of Destiny'. His future has been decided: he is third in line to the British throne, and one day will be King. We all seem to be fascinated by the traditions and pageantry of royalty. So it wasn't surprising that this child captured the imagination of people around the world. And every detail of his life will continue to make the news in the years ahead.

But here's something I bet you hadn't thought about. According to the US Bureau of Statistics, Prince George was only one of about 370,000 babies born that day. Most were born in the world's poorer countries. Many, sadly, have already died. Many more will not survive their first year. Those that do will grow up in poverty, knowing only hunger and misery. Some have the misfortune to be born into one of the world's war zones, and their childhood memories are destined to be filled with fear and uncertainty.

That is a sad fact about life today. But thankfully, that is not the whole story. About 2000 years ago, another King was born, in Bethlehem. Unlike Prince George he was born into humble circumstances, and only a few people noticed his birth. But the birth of this baby changed the destiny of every human being who has ever lived. I am, of course, talking about Jesus. Through his life, death, and resurrection the promise

of eternal life in a restored and renewed creation is made available to every human being.

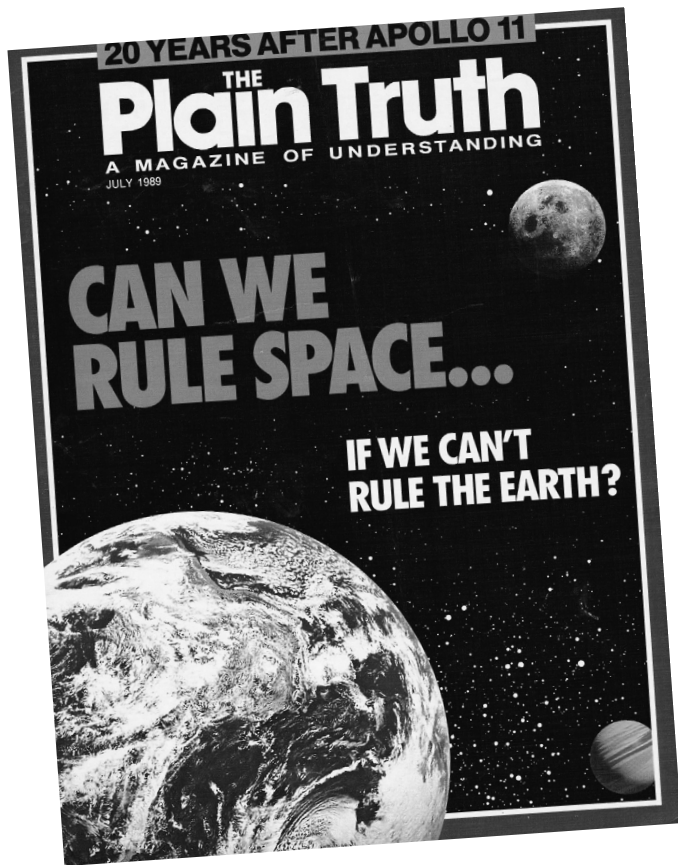
To God, every human life is precious; every baby born is a child of destiny. He loves his creation and is aware of every aspect of it. Jesus told us not even a sparrow lives and dies without God being aware of it. He added: 'Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows'.

Through Jesus, every human being has become a child of destiny.

And that is the core of the good news found in the gospel.

This is a transcript of the weekly 'Speaking of Life' radio programme by Joseph Tkach, president of Grace Communion International. For more information visit www.gci.org.





The Church That Changed

By Rex Morgan

Regular readers of *Inside Life* may have noticed that the name of our publisher has changed as of this issue from the Worldwide Church of God to Grace Communion International. This is an opportune time to recount the story of a remarkable denominational transformation that has been called 'unprecedented in church history'.



Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the Worldwide Church of God

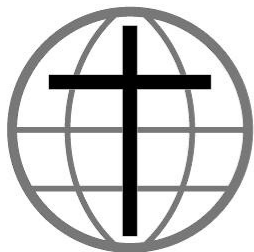
The Worldwide Church of God was founded in the USA in 1934 by Herbert W. Armstrong. He established 'The World Tomorrow' radio programme, and *The Plain Truth* magazine, both of which spread rapidly around the world and were available in New Zealand from the 1960s to the 1990s. 'The World Tomorrow' later moved to television and became one of the top two religious programmes in America, and the magazine circulation rose to several million every month. In NZ circulation of *The Plain Truth* peaked in 1986 at 65 000, about one for every 20 households in the nation.

The church held a number of unorthodox beliefs, although they were all believed very sincerely, and backed up by quotations from the scriptures.¹ After Herbert Armstrong's death in 1986 at the age of 93, church leaders began to research and question some of these long-standing teachings, and came to see that they

were in error. This confronted them with a major challenge. What should they do: keep the new understanding to themselves rather than upsetting the church members who were comfortable with their beliefs? Mr Armstrong's successor, Joseph Tkach Sr took the courageous path of promptly explaining to the church faithful that many of their deeply held and cherished beliefs were based on a misinterpretation of certain scriptures.

Thousands of church members were unable to agree with the changes and left the church, some of them starting up their own denominations. These groups later split further into diverse splinter churches and organisations. The Worldwide Church of God issued public apologies for the errors it had taught in the past.²

These remarkable changes soon caught the attention of other churches, several of which quickly and graciously welcomed the church into the fold of orthodoxy. In an article in *Christianity Today* entitled 'From the Fringe to the Fold', church historian, professor and author Ruth A. Tucker said: 'Never before in the history of Christianity has there been such a complete move to orthodox Christianity by an unorthodox fringe church'.³ She added: 'It's a gripping story that challenges Christians of all denominations to examine their beliefs and practices with openness and honesty'.



GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL

Living and Sharing the Gospel

Hank Hanegraaff, president of the Christian Research Institute, stated: 'This is unprecedented in church history. It's the very kind of thing that those who have given their lives in ministry to the kingdom of the cults hope for...They're charting brand-new territory'.⁴ Speaking of Joseph Tkach Sr, Hank Hanegraaff said: 'As successor to Worldwide Church of God founder Herbert W. Armstrong, Tkach boldly led the Pasadena, California-based church from cultism into Christianity...He was a man who risked losing his reputation, his livelihood, his career, and world respect in his all-out devotion to finding and proclaiming the truth'.⁵

Dr D. James Kennedy, celebrated televangelist and author, and senior minister at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Florida, remarked: 'The changes that have occurred within the Worldwide Church of God are far more intensive than those that brought about the Protestant Reformation'. Dr John R. Holland, president of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel stated: 'I praise God for His work of renewal in, and restoration of, the Worldwide Church of God. I believe this is one of the great miracles in the body of Christ in this century'.

Recently the church decided to change its name to reflect its new identity following such a profound transformation. Grace Communion International was chosen as the new name.

Current denominational president Joseph Tkach Jr explains: 'Grace lies at the heart of our values and mission as a transformed church. Our spiritual unity with God and with one another is reflected in the word

**'Grace lies at the heart of our values and mission...
Our spiritual unity with God...is reflected in the word Communion...
International identifies us as a unified body of believers...'**

Communion. The word International identifies us as a unified body of believers who span the globe, sharing a common history and journey of faith. We are a church that God radically transformed. Our new name is consistent with that transformation and aptly describes what God has made of our fellowship'.⁶

It is hugely disconcerting for anyone to realise that fundamental principles on which they have based their lives are mistaken. It takes courage for an individual to face up to huge errors like this, let alone an entire organisation admitting mistakes of this magnitude, especially when they threaten the future viability and existence of the institution. The fact that this happened can give hope to families of people caught up in all kinds of cultish beliefs. God is able to change the lives not only of individuals but even of entire organisations by giving them the humility to admit they are wrong.

'The church that changed' has reduced in numbers by more than 50% because of defections following the changes, but still maintains 50,000 members in approximately 100 countries, and is beginning to grow again in many parts of the world.

Church members who have lived through the changes are now able to look back on a journey that has involved the agonising pain of loss mixed with the joy of fresh discovery and renewed zeal. They have a deep understanding of the way people can be led into questionable beliefs. It is incumbent on each of us to examine our personal beliefs and be humble enough to admit error when it is proved, no matter how much it will cost us, and regardless of how right we thought we were!

Notes

- 1 Comprehensive details of the doctrinal changes can be viewed at www.gci.org/aboutus/history
- 2 An apology can be viewed at www.gci.org/aboutus/forgiveus
- 3 *Christianity Today*, July 15, 1996
- 4 *The Christian Research Journal*, winter 1996.
- 5 *Christian Research Newsletter* 9, no. 1, winter/spring 1996, p. 13.
- 6 The church's current teachings are outlined at www.gci.org/aboutus/beliefs



Joseph Tkach, president of Grace Communion International

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