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You should seek to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

I stumbled across this little pearl of advice years ago in an article for pastors about effective speaking, and as the years go by, the more I see how true it is. American humorist and writer Finley Peter Dunne, I later discovered, first penned the phrase around a hundred years ago, except he was writing about how newspapers should impact society. Since then, the adage has been adopted by various politicians, educators, lawyers, economists, advertisers and even actors for whatever purposes they were trying to achieve.

As Discern enters its seventh year, I find myself thinking about that phrase once more. What are we trying to achieve? Our goals are simple, but profound: explain past and current events in the light of God’s Word; hold out hope for a dying world based on God’s promises; and show how you can understand God and change your life.

We’re not original. We’re merely trying to frame the Word of God in our modern context. But, by its nature, that requires comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable.

The comfort and affliction of truth
When it comes to that, no one can outdo Jesus Christ. During His time on earth He was a master at compassionately helping and healing those afflicted by sin, and equally masterful at challenging and infuriating those comfortable in their sins. And at the heart of every matter He addressed lay a simple concept—truth!

It’s a shame the truth has never been popular—it has an amazing capacity for both comforting and afflicting. The Bible’s story is one of humanity always searching for a sense of comfort, but in all the wrong things. Why can’t we find peace, justice, equality, mercy, forgiveness, love, happiness, gentleness—solutions to our inability to get along? The answers have always been there, in God’s Word. The solutions afflict us, though, because they require something that most people simply don’t want—we don’t want anyone, even God, telling us what to do.

Discern exists to make a compelling case that we can find true spiritual and mental comfort only if we are obeying Him.

The Bible’s story is also one of how we, beginning with Adam and Eve, have consistently exchanged the truth of God for a variety of lies. Lies about how to live, how to get ahead, how to succeed, how to be happy, what to believe—even lies about God.

Discern exists to expose those lies, because anything short of truth will never create a permanent comfort zone.

Finding comfort in a boiling world
Strangely, though, the lying promise of comfort is exactly the allure of sin. “Try me!” sin’s tempting voice smoothly purrs. “I’ll make you happy. I’ll ease your pain. I’ll give you what you want. I’ll make you comfortable!”

Discern exists to warn of the affliction of consequences and to reveal the spiritual forces that are really driving these destructive temptations.

Dear readers, look around. Every pot on the world’s stove is boiling! Can we ignore the growing problems and retreat into some artificial comfort zone? Another great biblical lesson teaches us that only when our affliction grows so strong, only when our discomfort becomes so unbearable, only when our sense of inability to solve our problems becomes so great, do we humans turn to God for help.

God’s way of life holds comfort, and His Word promises that comfort for the afflicted is coming. We will, upon the return of Christ, find rest in Him and His way of life.

Until then, yes, we’ll try to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted with the truth of God.

Clyde Kilough
Editor
The Power of Hope

“I don’t know how I would get through losing my husband if I didn’t have the hope of the resurrection and the promise of no more pain and tears,” said Laura, a young widow. “Hope helps me not be overwhelmed by the current condition of the world—the suffering I can’t fix, the injustices I can’t stop.”

Hope may seem like a soft and fuzzy thing, but the people hanging on to it as a lifeline tell me it is stronger than any material known to man, and more powerful than the greatest forces that attack us.

Why is hope important?
Modern stories of the power of hope

Consider these poignant stories from Christians who depend on the power of hope:

When life is a constant struggle, hope may be the resource that sees us through. That’s what Carol found. She said, “As a single mother raising three children and very little income, sometimes all we had was hope.”

Sherrie told me about her hope in the midst of a severe trial: “One month ago we lost our son. It is that hope of seeing him again, and knowing that to him it will just be a moment in time. He will awaken to a whole new world, peace and prosperity. I have great hope in knowing he will find his place in that world and will eventually become a son of God.”

Margaret also talked about her hope for the future. “When my son was dying with cancer, the knowledge of God’s plan for him gave me much comfort and hope,” she said. “I know I will see him in the Kingdom of God!”

Another family wrote, “I don’t think there’s a day that can go by successfully without clinging on to hope. Where would our lives be without it? Without the promise of something far beyond what we know—far better than what we can imagine.”

Hope isn’t a warm fuzzy; it’s a strong support and unshakable foundation. The spiritual power of hope can help us overcome any trial. It’s a lifeline from God!
“In my darkest trials when all felt lost, it was the only thing that kept me afloat, nose barely above the surface. [The hope] that one day, I could fully be out of the way of my own progress. That this tent is only temporary—that God has something amazing planned for all of humanity if they choose life.

“Is there anything else worth more?”

Others have told me about chronic, debilitating medical conditions, sleepless nights, painful accidents, miscarriages, deaths of children and other loved ones, and so many other traumatic situations. Only hope in God’s promises could see them through these awful trials.

“Hope in God’s promises and prayers of friends and Church family helped me endure,” said Sarah. “Knowing that true peace, true joy and a world filled with knowledge of God [are coming] is still what I cling to today.”

John said, “During a time of great personal stress several years ago, Psalm 42:8 and Isaiah 41:10 [were] personal anchor verses. ... Revelation 21:4 gives such great hope for the future.”

Though haunted by the deaths of loved ones, Roy told me, “Yet hope, solid, proven hope of future lives for those [who have died] lifts, leads, carries us.”

The substance of things hoped for

One of the most famous verses in the Bible tells us, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for” (Hebrews 11:1; see “Hebrews 11: The Faith Chapter”). Faith is our belief and trust in the most trustworthy being in the universe: God. This provides the substance—the “confidence, firm trust, assurance” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon)—that supports the reality of those things we hope for.

Our hope rests in the power and promises of God. What God says, He will do. As Paul wrote, we live “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 1:2).

The book of Hebrews expands on this thought:

“That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast” (Hebrews 6:18-19).

David wrote this about our Deliverer and all-powerful God: “You are my rock and my fortress. … You are my strength. …

“Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD” (Psalm 31:3, 4, 24).

In the book of Jeremiah, God contrasted the worthlessness of trusting in other humans for strength (Jeremiah 17:5-6) with the blessing that comes from hoping in God.

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green,
and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit” (verses 7-8).

This highlights the deep-rooted stability and benefits of the power of hope in God.

God also expressed His loving intent in this beloved passage to the captives in Babylon:
“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Studying the promises and plan of God, and His gracious desire for us to be His children, can help solidify our faith and empower our hope.

To read more about the wonderful promises of God, see our online article “God’s Promises: Rock-Solid Hope and Assurance.”

How to grow in the power of hope

Hope is not something we either have or don’t have. It can falter, and it can grow.

We can strengthen our hope by studying the Holy Bible and all of its stories of the power of hope.

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

Paul also explained a different way Christians can look at trials to transform them into hope-building exercises.

“We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:3-5).

Learn more about how to receive the Holy Spirit in our article “How Do You Know You Have the Holy Spirit?” and see our related article “How to Grow in Faith.”

As we grow in hope, it should motivate us to change and become more and more like God—more and more pure and righteous and holy.

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1, 3).

The hope of glory

Ultimately, our hope is not just being delivered in this human life. It is being saved spiritually and given the promise of a meaningful, joyous eternal life. This incredible hope of being God’s children forever serves as protection from everything that this world can throw at us.

Paul described hope as a piece of the spiritual armor of God:
“But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

Salvation refers to being saved from sin and death and given eternal life. Paul also calls this the “hope of glory”:
“To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

What is glory? Explore this amazing but little-understood promise in our online articles “Hope in Christ” and “The Glory of God and Our Inheritance.”

Notice that the hope of deliverance is not just for us, but for all of creation. Creation has been suffering “futility” and “corruption,” waiting “in hope” of deliverance (Romans 8:20-21). “Creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God” (verse 19).

By definition, we hope for what is in the future.

“For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (Romans 8:24-25).

Though it is future, that doesn’t make it any less real or sure.

Unshakable hope

The hope of a Christian is more unshakable than anything in the physical realm. We think of our earth as solid and stable—until an
earthquake comes! But nothing can shake God’s promises.

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28).

Our real hope transcends this lifetime. King David wrote:

“Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope” (Psalm 16:9).

Peter made clear that this referred to Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection (Acts 2:25-26). Through His resurrection from the dead, we can also have the hope and assurance that we can be resurrected.

Paul powerfully argued against those who questioned the promise of being raised from the dead.

“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:19-22).

The awesome truth is that those who are Christ’s will be raised to incorruptible, immortal life at Christ’s coming (verses 23, 54).

David painted a beautiful picture of this hope of eternal life:

“You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11, emphasis added).

That powerful hope will become reality!

—Mike Bennett

The Bible connects faith, hope and love many times (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; Galatians 5:5-6; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Hebrews 6:10-12; 1 Peter 1:21-22).

These three godly characteristics all produce fruit. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3 Paul praised the members for their “work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Faith—belief in God and His promises—motivates us to strive to live as Jesus lived, walk as He walked. This includes obeying God and doing His works (John 14:12, 15).

Love—outgoing concern that is the essential characteristic of God (1 John 4:16)—labors to serve others (Hebrews 6:10).

Hope is not a fleeting or feeble thing, but a “desire of some good with expectation of obtaining it” (The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament, p. 570). Hope provides “full assurance,” thus it can motivate us to patient endurance (Hebrews 6:11-12). Godly hope is faith projected into the future.

Faith and hope work together hand in hand. It takes faith in God to have real hope, and it takes godly hope to have real, lasting faith.

Love elevates faith and hope above any selfishness, producing a desire for God’s plan to provide His blessings for everyone.

William Barclay puts it this way in his Daily Study Bible: “Faith without love is cold, and hope without love is grim. Love is the fire which kindles faith and it is the light which turns hope into certainty.”

Love’s outgoing nature and eternal qualities makes it the “greatest of these” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Study more about these big three in our online articles “What Is Faith?” “Our Future Hope” and “God Is Love.” (This sidebar is from a soon-to-be-published booklet Finding Hope ... in a Hopeless World.)
How to Heal a Broken Heart

Have you ever suffered a broken heart? Have you felt like you have been turned inside out, uncertain if you could carry on? Here’s how to heal a broken heart.
A broken heart can mean a wide range of things today. Though it can be used lightly, it can also be a poignant description of a state of mind brought on by catastrophic events.

Here are some examples of broken hearts from current news items:

• A father is brokenhearted over the murder of his teenage son.
• A couple is heartbroken after suffering a miscarriage and then learning that they are unable to have children.
• An entire nation has a collective broken heart after suffering a massive terrorist attack.
• Scientists find a broken heart over the death of a spouse can be fatal. This has been called the broken heart syndrome and the widowhood effect.

What is a broken heart?
The definition of a broken heart includes “a state of extreme grief or depression.” Perhaps the most obvious cause is the death of a loved one. Divorce, sometimes called “the death that never ends,” is another. The sudden ending of other deep, long-term relationships also causes heartbreak.

A broken heart could also involve abandonment or betrayal by someone on whom you depended—a parent, friend or child.

Every broken heart means some measure of loss—of companionship, of physical independence, of financial independence, of health, of mobility, of purpose in life, of life itself.

It might have happened to you or to someone very close to you. But whatever the case, life has changed. “Normal” has changed. Forever.

You feel exhausted physically, mentally and emotionally. You are spent, drained, hopeless. That is a broken heart.

Bible verses about healing a broken heart
A famous prophecy declares that the Messiah was sent “to heal the brokenhearted” (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18). God cares for those who are suffering emotional distress, relationship breakups and every type of acute sorrow.

This article looks at how He helps heal a broken heart.

The Hebrew word for “broken” in Isaiah 61:1 is “most often used to express bursting or breaking,” as well as to smash or shatter. The parallel Greek word in Luke 4:18 conveys a similar intense meaning, to “crush together” or “break in pieces” (The Complete Word Study Bible Dictionary, 2003).

The messianic promise is most assuredly about Jesus Christ healing “a state of extreme grief or depression.”

The psalmist also wrote this encouraging description of God: “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3).

(The Bible also speaks of a broken or contrite heart in terms of repentance, as explained in our article “Why Does God Look for a Broken and Contrite Heart?” But this article focuses on the emotional connection.)

Eight steps to healing your broken heart
Following are eight steps to receiving Jesus’ healing of your broken heart.

1. Ask, “Why, God?” We naturally begin by wanting to know why. You can find biblical answers to the big questions, such as: Why does God seem to hide? Why does He allow you to suffer? Why did He allow your loved one to die? Why does He allow natural disasters? Why does He allow the catastrophes of terrorism or war?

   We have articles on all of these questions on our website under “Why Does God Allow Evil and Suffering?” Understanding the answers will lay a foundation on which your healing can be built.

2. Avoid thinking, “What’s the use?” Don’t drift into this mind-set, giving in to destructive coping mechanisms—overeating, abusing alcohol, taking illegal drugs or just aimlessly wasting your time. Bitterness over your circumstances can trigger this, as can anger (the “hot side” of depression).

   A broken heart will change you. But it doesn’t have to be destructive, even if, for a time, it seems that way. God promises: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite [crushed] and humble [depressed] spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isaiah 57:15).

   God can help you avoid falling into the pit of self-destructive behaviors. And, if you have already fallen in, He can help you climb out. Our article “Five Enemies of Hope” can help.

3. Move forward. Decide not to perpetually lament your loss. I’m not saying, “Just get over it” or “Don’t grieve.” You need to grieve! But don’t get stuck on rehashing what can’t be changed. Beware of advice, even from good-hearted people, that only keeps you in the past.

   The apostle Paul lost his career, his standing in the community, the respect of his peers, perhaps even his marriage. He chose to refocus: “One

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thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

“Any temptation [or great trial] you face will be nothing new. But God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can handle. But He always provides a way of escape so that you will be able to endure and keep moving forward” (1 Corinthians 10:13, The Voice).

4. **Pray.** Often. That is the key to unlocking God’s spiritual healing. It seems that even the least spiritually oriented person cries out to God when brokenhearted. That’s okay.

If you haven’t known how to simply talk with God, now you can learn. Honestly and unreservedly just pour out your heart. Weep when you need to. “Prayer From the Heart” discusses the prayers of several biblical characters who needed to cry out to God.

5. **Saturate your mind with scriptures** about comfort, help, love, strength, hope and peace. We offer lists of dozens of verses on each of these in “Encouraging Bible Verses.” These aren’t “secret words” with mystical healing powers, to be tapped by reciting them over and over. But if you believe them and act on them, then you will find the way to healing your broken heart.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones” (Proverbs 3:5-8, emphasis added).

6. **“Meditate on these things.”** That’s what the apostle Paul wrote at the end of a list of positive mind-sets in Philippians 4:8. Christian meditation is thinking through the meaning and personal application of what you read in God’s Word.

A broken heart is a spiritual issue. It requires spiritual help. Godly meditation is “spiritual medication,” to use the healing analogy. For direction, use our articles “What Is Meditation?” and “Christian Meditation.”

7. **Discover your purpose in life.** Jesus famously counseled His disciples not to worry about life—what they would eat, what they would drink, what they would wear. These are the necessities of life!

Yet He pointedly asked whether life isn’t more than these things (see Matthew 6:25).

For the brokenhearted, the questions might be, “Is not life more than marriage? Than friendship? Than career? Than health?”

Intellectually, we might answer, “Yes.” But emotionally it’s much, much harder to answer in the affirmative.

It is crushing, heartbreaking, when these are snatched from you. But their loss can cause you to follow the advice Jesus gave at the end of this discussion. He told His disciples to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” and He gave His word that “all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Your core purpose for being alive wasn’t just so that you could have any of those things you have now lost. It’s greater than you could ever imagine. Find out what it is with *God’s Purpose for You: Discovering Why You Were Born.***

8. **Believe that the best is yet ahead.** There is a better world coming. This is not just a tagline. It’s the “in case of emergency, break glass” point! It’s what you turn to when your heart is still broken.

God inspired Isaiah to promise that someday “there will be a king who rules with integrity, and national leaders who govern with justice. Each of them will be like a shelter from the wind and a place to hide from storms. They will be like streams flowing in a desert, like the shadow of a giant rock in a barren land” (Isaiah 32:1-2, Good News Translation).

Jesus Christ is that King. The world He rules will be a world transformed. It will be a world filled with life. With family. With health. With hope. Nothing we experience in this life—good or bad—can compare with what is coming.

Draw strength from this genuine good news. This publication will help you find the promise of it in Scripture: *The Mystery of the Kingdom.*

Jesus Christ truly does heal the brokenhearted. He can begin healing yours now.

—Cecil Maranville
The world is awash in religious information but floundering when it comes to spiritual discernment. How can you sort through the confusion?

He and his wife had just learned that the Sabbath was on Saturday instead of Sunday, and switching to a different day of worship had major implications for their future. Having gone to church on Sunday all their lives, they wondered how this could be.

There was also an economic factor. He learned that the Sabbath was to be a day of rest, but he had a job that required him to work half a day on Saturdays. As a young married man with two small boys to raise, he knew his job was very important to his family’s survival.
As he considered what to do, he carefully studied the scriptures that showed the Sabbath was on the seventh day. They made sense.

Then he went to the pastor of the church he was attending and asked why that denomination worshipped on Sundays. The pastor gave a standard answer—Sunday was chosen to honor the resurrection of Christ. Not knowing that Jesus actually rose on another day, this explanation also made sense to the young professional.

That accountant was my father, and he was stymied. Both explanations seemed logical to him at the time.

**Need for spiritual discernment**

The challenge my dad faced called for spiritual discernment—the ability to clearly see what God desired. This ability is a critical need for all who wish to worship God “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24).

In our world today, there is no lack of seemingly logical explanations for a wide variety of religious beliefs—some diametrically opposed to each other! So how can we acquire the spiritual discernment needed to determine how to worship God as He commands?

Let’s look at seven keys that can help us develop this vitally important skill.

**Key 1 Recognize that there are spiritual absolutes**

This is foundational for developing spiritual discernment. Absolutes are required in math, science, construction, logic, reasoning, and in almost every walk of life. But when it comes to God’s laws and morality, many people want to decide for themselves what is right and wrong. They refuse to acknowledge that God has authority over our lives and that He gives us specific instructions that we are to always follow, regardless of the circumstances.

In today’s environment that is hostile toward God’s good and beneficial laws, many people cite Christ’s statement: “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1). People who reject most of the Bible’s teachings sometimes cite this verse. And sometimes even people claiming to be Christians misunderstand what Christ was saying.

A careful reading of Matthew 7:1-3 reveals that Jesus was teaching His followers not to judge in a hypocritical manner. The principle He was teaching was that we need to first resolve our own faults before we try to help our brother resolve his. If we weren’t to judge at all, we couldn’t help our brother.

On another occasion, Jesus said it more clearly: “Judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24, emphasis added throughout).

**Key 2 Ask God for help**

Realizing that we don’t inherently know all that we need to know is another fundamental principle for developing spiritual discernment. Today’s popular mantras to simply follow your heart or to look inside yourself for answers to life’s questions are not biblically correct.

Early in his reign King Solomon said: “Now O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. … Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil” (1 Kings 3:7, 9).

His words “pleased the LORD,”
and God gave Solomon what he had requested (verses 10, 12). When Solomon recorded some of the wisdom God had given him, he twice in the book of Proverbs noted that “there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Echoing our need for help, Jeremiah told God: “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Later, the prophet added: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9).

And the psalmist requested of God: “Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments” (Psalm 119:66). We can do the same. We can ask God for spiritual discernment and know that Jesus promised, “Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive” (Matthew 21:22).

**Key 3** Hate what God hates; love what God loves

At creation, mankind was made in God’s image, and God’s desire is for us to eventually become like Him as members of His eternal family. Paul explained that God has called us to be “conformed to the image of His Son,” and that the end result of this process is that our bodies will be “conformed to His glorious body” (Romans 8:29; Philippians 3:21).

With this concept in mind, Paul admonished the Corinthians: “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Imitating God is how we become more like God, and the more we are like God, the better our spiritual discernment becomes. As we grow in discernment, our values, our thinking and our judgment become more and more like God’s.

So what should we imitate about God?

A good place to start is by hating what God hates and loving what God loves. Please note that God loves people and wants everyone to be in His family, but He also hates sin because of the toll it takes upon humans (John 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:9; Romans 6:23).

So what does the Bible reveal regarding things God hates? The list is quite extensive, but here are a few types of conduct that God loathes—some of which He even describes as abominations: false worship (Deuteronomy 12:31; 16:22), divorce (Malachi 2:16), humans eating unclean meats (Leviticus 11:11), cross dressing (Deuteronomy 22:5), businessmen cheating others (Proverbs 11:1), lying (Proverbs 12:22), and the way of the wicked (Proverbs 15:9).

For seven more things God hates, see Proverbs 6:16-19. Capping off this point, Psalm 97:10 says, “You who love the Lord, hate evil!”

And what does God love? He loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). He appreciates our heartfelt prayers (Revelation 5:8). He is pleased to see us do good and share with others (Hebrews 13:16), and He will take pleasure in inviting the saints into His Kingdom (Luke 12:32).

Amos the prophet summarized this key as he succinctly admonished the people of his day: “Hate evil, love good” (Amos 5:15). This advice is also valid today.

In the next issue we’ll consider four more keys that can help us develop spiritual discernment.

—David Treybig
God’s Words of Wisdom for You

The Bible’s wisdom literature pictures what it looks like to live life the way God intended. These words of wisdom tackle difficult questions along the way.

The word *wisdom*, in the New King James Version of the Bible, appears 227 times across 66 books. Ninety-nine of those instances are contained in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job. That means if you’re reading a passage about wisdom, there’s more than a 40 percent chance you’re reading one of those books.

It’s little wonder those three books are traditionally labeled “wisdom literature.” Wisdom is a concept sitting at the core of each of these books, but the connection goes deeper than that.

All of these books grapple with the question, “What does life look like when we live it the way God intended?” And all three of these books come at that same question from different perspectives, exploring different threads of reasoning and trains of thought—but coming, in the end, to remarkably similar conclusions.

**Solomon’s words of wisdom in Proverbs**

Solomon wasn’t just a wise king—He was the *wisest* king (1 Kings 3:9-12). God gave him special insight into both how the world works and how people work.

Solomon “spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. ... And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon” (1 Kings 4:32, 34).
Most of those 3,000 proverbs have been lost to time, but God preserved quite a few of them for us in the aptly named book of Proverbs.

The theme of Proverbs is wisdom—practical, down-to-earth instructions for dealing with difficult situations (and difficult people). Looking through the lens of the book of Proverbs, you see that living life as God intended means taking hold of wisdom and using it to structure your life.

And what is wisdom? Solomon personified wisdom this way: “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth. ... I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight” (Proverbs 8:22-23, 30).

Solomon identified wisdom as a tool God used to order and structure the universe we live in. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,” he explained (Proverbs 9:10). By starting with respect and admiration for God, we can tap into that wisdom, understand the world around us and live fulfilling lives.

The rest of the book is filled with concise yet profound insights into the inner workings of God’s creation. And even though the book is a few thousand years old, the wisdom of Solomon is hardly out-of-date.

Whether you’re looking for advice on marriage, your career, social conflict or something else, it’s all there. Find some fascinating lists of practical wisdom in our online articles “How to Be Wise” and “Proverbs.”

But Proverbs is only part of the picture. While it provides a very cause-and-effect approach to life, it doesn’t often address the exceptions. Sometimes bad things happen to good people, and sometimes good things happen to bad people. Why? How can that factor into life as God intended?

That’s where the book of Ecclesiastes comes in.

Words of wisdom in Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes was written by “the Preacher,” who we believe to be Solomon—an older, depressed Solomon whose decisions had taken him far from the wisdom God had provided him. The Bible tells us that “when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God” (1 Kings 11:4).

Ecclesiastes reads like a reckless experiment—a man with unbridled power and resources on the hunt for the key to happiness and meaning: “Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure” (Ecclesiastes 2:10). He did whatever he wanted, however he wanted, whenever he wanted.

Throughout the book, the Preacher becomes disillusioned with a world that doesn’t seem to function according to any sort of rhyme or reason. He sees a world where good people suffer, evil people prosper, death comes for the rich and for the poor, success fades into obscurity, and everything repeats itself in an endless, exhausting, pointless cycle.

It all builds to a depressing conclusion: “Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher, ‘all is vanity”’ (Ecclesiastes 12:8).

And then comes a footnote—a short, six-verse commentary on the Preacher’s desire to seek out words of wisdom and truth. It ends like this:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Yes, sometimes the world feels awful. Or unfair. Or like a total throw of the dice where your best efforts are a meaningless waste of time. But in spite of all that, Ecclesiastes ends with a reminder that God is still in control, and still calling the shots, even when things aren’t working the way we expect.

The book of Job steps in to tackle the most difficult question of all: Why does obedience to God not always yield the results we expect?
Words of wisdom in Job

The book of Job is a story of a man who lived and died long before Solomon was ever born—a man who was “blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1).

In short order, Job’s perfect life is smashed to pieces. His 10 children die in a single catastrophe, and every tangible material good he owns is destroyed, stolen or burned. Job gets no explanation from God why this happened, but his friends think they know the answer: Job must have sinned. Terribly. Bad things don’t happen to good people; therefore, God was punishing Job for something. Job maintains that he has done nothing wrong, and this goes on for chapters and chapters—Job’s friends trying to help him see reason, with Job becoming more and more agitated, eventually accusing God of injustice and demanding arbitration.

What Job can’t see—and what we become privy to as readers of this story—is what was happening behind the curtain. Job’s friends were wrong; he hadn’t sinned and brought this upon himself. God calls him His servant, blameless and upright, unique on the face of the earth (Job 1:8). But Job was wrong too; God was not being unjust in allowing Job’s life to crumble. And Satan, who had been challenging God’s decisions and antagonizing Job, was proven the most wrong of all.

In the end, Job gets his audience with God—but instead of answering Job’s accusations directly, God puts Job in the hot seat. “Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” asks God. “Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me” (Job 38:2-3). And for three chapters, God asks Job to demonstrate his understanding of the universe.

Was he there when God designed and created the earth? Does he have the wisdom and the power to summon forth light or snow or the oceans or thunder? Can he bind the stars into formations? Can he command the animals of the earth? Does he understand their design?

Can he right all the injustices in the world? Can he fathom the depth and breadth of everything God has done and is doing?

And the answer is no. Of course not. Job cannot do these things; he cannot even understand these things. God’s divine perspective and wisdom and power allows Him to comprehend and plan and enact things that Job’s tiny human brain can’t begin to imagine—that our tiny human brains can’t begin to imagine.

Just because things aren’t working the way we expect doesn’t mean that God isn’t involved and guiding things to a favorable outcome.

Job replies to God, “I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, ‘Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. … I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:2-6).

Putting the pieces together

What does it look like to live life the way God intended? It’s not a simple question. It takes three books of wisdom literature to even scratch the surface of the subject. But put the messages of those books together, and this is the answer we find:

Through wisdom, God structured and ordered the universe in a way that makes sense. When we embrace God’s words of wisdom, we can live a fulfilling life that also makes sense. But sometimes life doesn’t make sense—and when that happens, we obey God anyway, trusting that He sees what we can’t, knowing that He will ultimately reward those who embrace His words of wisdom and follow His lead.

The prophecies of Micah aren’t regarded as wisdom literature, but in a single verse, Micah offers what might be the most succinct overview of the lesson the Bible’s wisdom literature has to offer:

“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). Do justly.

Love mercy.

Walk humbly.

Trust God with the rest.

For more insight into these three books, see our online articles on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job.

—Jeremy Lallier

To gain insight into who God really is, download our free Study Guide 7 Keys to Better Bible Study.
How Darwin’s Theory of Evolution Changed the World

Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution has permeated nearly every aspect of our world and changed it dramatically. How is Darwinism affecting you?

Evolutionary thinking is all around us. Anytime we visit a zoo or natural history museum, watch a nature program or read a science or wildlife magazine, we will likely be exposed to evolutionary concepts.

In most public schools and universities, evolution is a major part of the biology and science curricula. We’re bombarded from nearly every avenue with the idea that life originated by chance and eventually developed into the organisms we see today.

It’s had a major effect on our society. A 2019 Pew Research Center study reported that a total of 81 percent of American adults believe in evolution. This includes 33 percent who hold that humans evolved due to processes like natural selection with no involvement by a Creator, along with 48 percent who think human evolution occurred through processes guided or allowed by a higher power.

Rewind 160 years to the beginning of Darwin’s theory of evolution

Historically speaking, the belief in evolution is a relatively new phenomenon. Throughout the history of Western civilization, people in most cultures believed that humankind and all forms of life were specially created by God (or other deities, albeit false).

It wasn’t until 1859, when British scientist Charles Darwin published his book *On the Origin of Species*, that the public began to think otherwise. This was a major turning point in history, because it influenced people’s decisions to turn their backs on God, the Bible and religion.

In his book, Charles Darwin outlined the basics of his evolutionary theory. He claimed that animal and plant species have changed over time and will
continue to change, giving rise to new, more advanced species. He contended that evolutionary changes were a result of natural selection, meaning the organisms with the most advantageous inheritable traits survive and reproduce at a higher rate than weaker individuals, perpetuating the strongest variations and eliminating the unfavorable ones.

Eventually, Darwin reasoned, this could result in a species changing enough of its characteristics to develop into a totally new creature. He maintained that ultimately all life-forms are related, from finches to monkeys to tulips, sharing a common single-celled ancestor that existed millions of years ago.

Human beings weren’t directly addressed in Origin of Species, yet Darwin was convinced that natural selection also applied to mankind. For that reason, he wrote another book. Darwin’s The Descent of Man was published in 1871.

He stated his purpose in Chapter 2: “to show that there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties.” He insisted that humans are just another type of animal, not much different from the great apes, except for the acquisition of a few beneficial traits.

Charles Darwin wasn’t the first to espouse evolutionary concepts. A number of scientists before him entertained the notion that species could evolve, but had no plausible hypothesis for what caused the changes. It was Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection that provided the world’s scientists and philosophers with the explanation to “prove” in their minds that evolutionary changes could occur and had indeed happened.

**Paving the way for disbelief**

Today evolutionists hail Charles Darwin as a hero of discovery. But for those who believe in God and that the Bible is His infallible Word, Darwin’s ideas are hardly something to celebrate. Darwinism seeks to explain all the wonder, beauty and variety we see in nature without a supernatural Creator. For those who are so inclined, this means the concept of God can be discarded.

A move toward secularism started building in Europe during the mid-19th century, right about the time Darwin wrote Origin of Species. Secularism is the belief that mankind does not need God or His laws. It is based on the philosophy known as naturalism, meaning there is no spirit realm and physical matter is all that exists.

Secularists want religion and all references to God and the Bible out of schools, governmental bodies and public life. Darwinism provided them with the fuel to spread their ideology far and wide. Sadly, that’s exactly what has happened.

Once the Bible is no longer the basis for understanding our lives, life ultimately becomes meaningless. The only purpose evolutionists can claim for human existence is survival—to get whatever they can for themselves in this life (since they do not envision an afterlife) and reproduce and pass on their genes.

Naturalist Chet Raymo admits as much in his book Skeptics and True Believers (1998). He explains that Darwin’s theory of evolution teaches that “our lives are brief and inconsequential in the cosmic scheme of things” (p. 110). He also proposes that Darwinism is a major reason the scientific community concluded years ago that, in the words of Steven Weinberg, “the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless” (p. 154).

Evolutionists don’t believe what the Bible clearly spells out: that God created mankind in His image (Genesis 1:27) with a special plan in mind—to bring “many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10-11)—and that the purpose for our lives is to prepare for future roles in God’s eternal Kingdom.

**What about theistic evolution?**

Darwinism is opposed to God’s truths. Yet there are those who try to integrate evolutionary theory with the biblical creation account. Known as theistic evolutionists, they believe God created the universe and everything in it, but did so using evolutionary processes over billions of years.

Theistic evolution asserts that God jump-started creation by first creating a single-celled organism, and then stepped back and let it evolve. However, Genesis 1 tells us God created plants, animals and mankind by separate commands.

Both concepts can’t be true. Trying to reconcile them leads to the idea that there wasn’t a literal creation over a set period of time, and that the biblical creation account is merely metaphorical. This paves the way for disbelieving other parts of the Bible as well.

Like traditional evolution, theistic
evolution reduces God’s Word to insignificance and opens the door to ungodly thinking. (See our online article “Theistic Evolution.”)

**Immorality—the unavoidable result of Darwin’s theory of evolution**

When society stops believing in God and the Bible, people start deciding for themselves how to live. They no longer recognize God’s laws as binding or believe they are accountable to Him. The inevitable outcome is a decline in morality.

Some people are actually drawn to evolution because it gives them a reason to not believe in Go and thus free themselves of moral restraints.

Writer and philosopher Aldous Huxley, an ardent proponent of Darwinism, stated candidly in his 1937 essay *Ends and Means*: “For myself as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was … from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.”

The apostle Paul addresses this mind-set in Romans 1:28-29. He warns us that rejecting God leads to a “debased mind” and, in turn, unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, strife, deceit and evil-mindedness.

There are other ways, too, that espousing Darwinism can lead to ungodly behavior. Some reason that if mankind is evolving, it follows that what’s right and good also changes. Therefore, morality must be relative to the conditions of life at any given time—spurring the thinking that there are no fixed rules we must live by.

**Social Darwinism**

Others have applied Darwin’s biological theory to how people interact with each other. This is known as social Darwinism. The thinking is, if animals and plants are locked in a struggle for existence, preserving the strong and eradicating the weak, this same process of “survival of the fittest” also applies to societies.

Social Darwinism has been used to try to excuse some of mankind’s most corrupt and vile practices, including cutthroat business competition, corporate greed, eugenics, racism and genocide. These have all been justified under the guise of it being natural to exploit, crush and eliminate weaker individuals and businesses.

The most infamous application of social Darwinism was when Adolf Hitler tried to justify killing millions of Jews—whom he saw as “unfit”—and establish his master Aryan race. Darwin himself was critical of society’s efforts to help the impoverished and sickly. He wrote in Chapter 5 of *The Descent of Man* that these practices were “highly injurious to the race of man.” Darwin believed natural selection should be allowed to run its course for those who were destined to be eliminated. That is the terrible, but logical conclusion of Darwinism.

**Nothing “right” about evolution**

The truth is, nothing good can come from accepting Darwin’s theory of evolution or its modern adaptations. It is a cruel, depressing and hopeless approach to our existence. Without knowing that we have a loving God who’s in control and that there’s an incredible purpose to our lives, it is impossible to have a truly positive outlook.

Moreover, no culture can survive when individuals make their own rules and live for themselves. Ruthless competition at the expense of others is the exact opposite of how God wants mankind to live. The Bible instructs the strong to help the weak (Romans 15:1-3).

The other major problem with Darwin’s theory of evolution is that it’s unprovable. If evolution were true, there should be abundant evidence in the fossil records of transitional forms between species and proof of new species developing in the wild—but there isn’t. The only proof has been for microevolution—adaptation, or minor changes within existing species—which we do not dispute. (See our online article “Microevolution vs. Macroevolution.”)

Furthermore, neither Darwin nor any other scientist has been able to come up with a credible answer for where the original single-celled organism came from.

Still, many people cling to the idea of evolution and insist it’s true. This is to be expected. Romans 8:7 says that “the carnal mind is enmity against God.” Human nature would rather believe there is no God and no purpose for life, rather than submit to a higher power.

The Bible tells us that “scoffers will come in the last days” (2 Peter 3:3). There will be those who doubt God’s existence and ridicule those who don’t believe in evolution, right up until the time Christ returns.

But that’s when the scoffers and all of mankind will learn the truth—that we do have a Creator, and submitting to Him is the only way to a truly happy, meaningful existence.

—Becky Sweat
With today’s advanced tools of investigation, the evidence for life originating from a superintelligent Designer is more overwhelming than ever. In addition to many good books explaining the reality of what science has discovered inside the cell, there are also video productions that show the staggering complexity of life’s components. One excellent video is ORIGIN, a sequel to Unlocking the Mystery of Life.

The saying “a picture is worth a thousand words” is demonstrated in this video. The reality of the workings of the millions of machines inside a living cell is so incredibly complex that a visual portrayal is extremely helpful. It’s one thing to read about the complex machines inside a living cell. It’s much more impressive to see these machines in action.

The first part of the video shows the awesome complexity involved for even the simplest living cell to form and come to life. Amino acids are complex enough. But many different amino acids must join together perfectly before a functional protein can ever form.

Among the animations is an unforgettable demonstration of the statistical impossibility of a functional protein forming from amino acids on its own. In this portrayal a single amoeba crosses the entire universe, back and forth, multiple times, at the speed of one foot per year. Still, in all that time,
statistically no viable protein would yet be formed from random combinations of amino acids.

Animations in this video show transcription machinery that transforms complex DNA instructions into functional proteins, and machines that replicate entire, enormously complex cells.

As with many intelligent design resources, this production does not get into theological discussions. It simply focuses on proving that the origin of life is statistically and scientifically impossible by the theory of evolution.

Here is the producer’s description of this video: “With spectacular computer animation and cutting-edge research, ORIGIN examines a question that has baffled science for centuries: How did life on Earth begin? Today, most researchers insist it arose through simple chemistry that—without direction of plan—transformed inanimate matter into the first living cell. Yet, this explanation is devoid of evidence and unsatisfying, even to its most ardent supporters.”

The explanations contained in this 46-minute video should prove very helpful to students—from elementary- to college-level—and to all of us who are bombarded almost daily with evolutionary biases.

Reviewed by Paul Luecke

Undeniable: How Biology Confirms Our Intuition That Life Is Designed

By Douglas Axe
Published by Harper One, 2016
ISBN 978-0062349583
298 pages

Douglas Axe received his doctorate from the California Institute of Technology and has written papers for several prestigious scientific journals such as The Journal of Molecular Biology and The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

He specialized in studying proteins, and he has found that they are very complex. On page 61 he states: “Bricks and breakfasts are made only if someone makes them. We know of no exceptions. With that assurance, we confidently apply the same intuition to primordial soup—only to be told we’re wrong.”

In other words, if a brick is found in ancient sediment, we automatically assume that it was man-made. Yet when we find out about the incredible complexity of proteins, scientists assert they were made by chance.

On page 19 Dr. Axe quotes psychologist Alison Gopnik: “By elementary school-age,’ she wrote, ‘children start to invoke an ultimate God-like designer to explain the complexity of the world around them—even children brought up as atheists.’

In other words, children must be taught to deny what is obvious. Life was designed!

Dr. Axe conducted extensive research into the function of proteins. On page 81 he states: “To explain how natural proteins, with their exquisite functions, could have appeared by accident is a monumental challenge.”

What is the origin of proteins? On page 57 Dr. Axe describes how his experiments enabled him to “put a number on the actual rarity” of accidentally producing new functional proteins: “only one good protein sequence for every $10^{74}$ [that’s 1 followed by 74 zeros] bad ones.”

His book reflects the conclusions of someone who has studied in detail the incredible complexity of proteins. Scientists who believe in evolution can’t really explain the existence of the amazing proteins we find in life.

The common idea is that scientists have no bias and only look at the facts. Dr. Axe points out that scientists are human and can be influenced by bias. On page 39 he states: “Oddly enough, I now see how the pursuit of prestige—so evident in my own life—goes a long way toward explaining how science gets stuck on certain wrong ideas.”

Undeniable has many important facts that point to a creator who designed life!

Reviewed by Bill Jahns

The Wonder of Water: Water’s Profound Fitness for Life on Earth and Mankind

By Michael Denton
Published by Discovery Institute Press, 2017
ISBN: 978-1936599479
226 pages

Dr. Denton is a British-Australian biochemist and author, with M.D. and Ph.D. degrees from British universities. In many of his writings
the companion volumes for which he is best-known: his 1985 Evolution: A Theory in Crisis and his 2016 Evolution: Still a Theory in Crisis, he discusses weaknesses in the theory of evolution, and also the evidence in the natural world of a super designing intelligence responsible for it all.

In this volume, he describes the unique properties of water that make advanced life possible.

Dr. Denton describes and comments on the marvelous “unique fitness” of water for life. “The one substance, water, is uniquely fit to serve two utterly different vital ends—ends as different as can be conceived: the erosion of rock and the circulation of the blood. Both are absolutely vital to our existence. No other substance in nature comes close to having the essential set of properties needed to do these two jobs” (p. 12).

But there is much more. Dr. Denton delves into other unique attributes of water that make possible complex life, including human life. Among these are its thermal, chemical and physical properties. Altogether, they point to a causative, designing intelligence—a conclusion quite at odds with the underlying assumption of the neo-Darwinian theory, which is based purely on randomness in an entirely materialistic universe.

Taken together, these unique properties of water “reveal that life on Earth—including humankind—is not mere cosmic happenstance. Through its magic, water sings a universal song of life, and in its special fitness for human physiology it sings a special song of man. The properties of water show that beings with our biology do indeed occupy a special central place in the order of nature, and that the blueprint for life was present in the properties of matter from the moment of creation” (p. 13).

Denton, though not a religious man, concludes that something or someone quite intelligent and purposeful must be behind the wonders of water.

This book is one of a series by the author dealing with the evidence that our planet is “privileged”—specially designed for life—and different from any other place in the universe.

Reviewed by Tom Kirkpatrick
The Middle East is in a mess. Local wars can drag the entire region into conflict. Prophecy indicates that this region will affect the entire world.

When 26-year-old Mohamed Bouazizi, a struggling street vendor who felt harassed by an authoritarian government, set himself alight, little did he know that his protest would set the Middle East on fire.

The continuing repercussions of the Arab Spring
His action first triggered the Jasmine Revolution in his home country, Tunisia, toppling the 23-year rule of the nation’s president in early 2011.

From there, the Arab Spring challenged the authoritarian rule in many Middle East nations. Protests quickly spread to Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Protests in Egypt led to the ousting of Hosni Mubarak, ending his 30-year rule. In Libya unrest caused the removal of Muammar Gaddafi, ending his 42-year rule and plunging the nation into instability and tribal warfare that continue to this day.

The Arab Spring in Syria did not lead to the toppling of President Bashar al-Assad. Instead, he tenaciously fought back, plunging Syria into a brutal eight-year civil war that is still ongoing. His government has grappled to regain control from the Syrian rebels, Kurds, Islamic State and many other small groups that have all been vying for power.

To make matters worse, the wider region has been drawn into the Syrian conflict, with Iran backing the government, while Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States have backed various Syrian rebel groups. International powers have also been drawn in, with Russia backing the government and the U.S. backing Syrian rebels.

Similarly, civil war also continues in Yemen. The Houthis in Yemen are backed by Iran, which many see as the instigator of the conflict, leading the U.S., U.K. and France to back Saudi Arabia in the war.

War in the Middle East gets very messy, very fast. The conflicts are very complicated. But what makes these wars so complicated?

Multifaceted warfare
Middle East wars are complex because of the many facets involved. All local conflicts in the Middle East must be seen in light of three overarching regional conflicts:

• **Israel-Arab conflict:** The Arab nations have opposed the nation of Israel from the time it was reborn in 1948. At that time, Israel battled for its existence against Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. In spite of being attacked from all sides, Israel miraculously held the Arab armies back and survived. This story was repeated in 1967, when Israel managed to capture the entire city of Jerusalem for the first time since the Jews were expelled by the Romans. Israel was also victorious when they were attacked on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) in 1973.

• **Sunni-Shiite rivalry:** What started in the seventh century as a conflict about who was the rightful heir to the Prophet...
Muhammad has led to deep divisions and a power struggle in the Middle East between Sunni-led Saudi Arabia and Shiite-led Iran. Iran supports Shia states and groups such as the Houthis in Yemen, the Alawites in Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Saudi Arabia, in turn, supports the opposing Sunni groups, intensifying the rivalry between the two Islamic sects.

- **Sunni-Sunni power struggle:** Turkey and Qatar are vying for supremacy over the Sunni world against Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Egypt. Turkey supports the Muslim Brotherhood and welcomed the Arab Spring that bought them to power in Egypt. Saudi Arabia’s rulers see the Muslim Brotherhood as a threat to their power and supported the Egyptian military leaders who have squashed the Muslim Brotherhood.

**Shifting alliances and American retreat lead to more chaos**

To complicate the Middle East crisis further, nations form alliances with non-state actors that also act independently. This can make accountability for actions difficult to determine. When Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen attack a Saudi oil refinery, who does the world blame—the Houthis or Iran? Of course, Iran denies responsibility.

Also, nations can be allies in one battle and enemies in another. The impact of big power actions has also complicated things through the centuries. Since the Second World War, the United States has played a major role in the Middle East, but that role has been declining. As Mike Pompeo said in a speech in Cairo in January 2019, “when America retreats, chaos often follows.” Yet America has been retreating from the Middle East as it looks inward.

For example, as the U.S. withdrew from northern Syria in October, Turkey invaded, attacking the Kurds that the U.S. had been supporting. The chaos that ensued led to around 200,000 fleeing the violence, while Russia cemented its position as the new power broker between Syria and Turkey.

And the frustrations that led to previous popular uprisings are still boiling. Recent uprisings have ousted the leaders of Sudan and Lebanon. Widespread protests continue in these countries and others, with the protestors wanting the elites removed from government.

The Middle East crisis continues. While leaders of nations of the Middle East and North Africa try to cling to power, it seems the region is falling apart and giving way to tribalism. Yet Bible prophecies show that out of this region a power will form that will trigger a chain of events that will lead to Christ’s return.

**A confederacy against Israel**

Rarely do the Arab nations unite, but the Bible indicates a confederacy of nations forming with a single purpose. Psalm 83 shows a confederacy of mainly Middle Eastern nations coming together to say, “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more” (verse 4). Here the psalmist appeals to God to intervene against this overwhelming force threatening the descendants of Israel and to deal with Israel’s enemies as He had done in the days of old (verses 1-3, 9-18). The modern descendants of Israel include more than just the tribe of Judah found in the nation called Israel today (see “Who Are the 12 Tribes of Israel Today?”), but the Jewish nation has certainly faced such danger.

Immediately after the nation of Israel was born in 1948, there were cries from Middle Eastern nations and Islamic organizations to destroy the newly formed nation, a goal shared by both Sunni and Shia Islam.

In 1948 Sheikh Hassan el-Bana, head of the Muslim Brotherhood, said, “If the Jewish state becomes a fact, and this is realized by the Arab peoples, they will drive the Jews who live in their midst into the sea.” Instead, he was overrun and humiliated in a war that ended in only six days.
In 2018 President Erdogan of Turkey wrote “A Call for Urgent Action,” calling for the 57 members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to form an “Army of Islam” to simultaneously attack Israel from all sides.

In September Iran’s top general, Hossein Salami, said, “This sinister regime [Israel] must be wiped off the map and this is no longer ... a dream [but] it is an achievable goal.” In this he echoed calls by previous leaders of Iran.

The king of the South vs. the king of the North

This anti-Israel rhetoric may play a role in bringing together the end-time king of the South described in the prophecy of Daniel 11. This detailed prophecy outlines a series of wars between the king of the North and the king of the South (so named because of their geographical position from the nation of Israel).

Much of Daniel 11 has been fulfilled and describes a tug-of-war between the ancient Seleucid Empire located in the north (in Syria/Babylon) and the Ptolemaic Empire located in the south (in Egypt). This conflict spanned several hundred years (verses 5-36), with the Roman Empire, which would become the new king of the North, interrupting the conflict in verse 30.

Then suddenly the prophecy fast-forwards to the end times in verse 40, a significant verse indicating the beginning of the “time of the end.” The king of the South reemerges with an aggressive act against the king of the North, a revived Roman (European) empire. This triggers a war in the Middle East that leads to Christ’s return.

- The king of the North will enter Israel. We are warned that desolation is approaching when this happens (Daniel 11:41; Luke 21:20-21).
- The king of the North will set up an “abomination of desolation,” something that is detestable to God and is tied to the removal of sacrifices. This shows that sacrifices will be initiated again. In the volatile environment of Jerusalem, perhaps the restarting of sacrifices will be a triggering event that will bring the emergence of the king of the South and those he will lead. Daniel reveals this is related to a countdown to Christ’s return (Daniel 12:11).
- Soon after, the Great Tribulation will begin (Matthew 24:21), a 3.5-year period also described as “a time, and times, and half a time” (Revelation 12:14; Daniel 12:7) and as 42 months or 1,260 days of terrible events leading to Christ’s return (Revelation 11:2-3; 13:5).
- Christ will intervene to prevent total annihilation of all life on earth (Matthew 24:22).

We should note that as these events unfold, they will likely not be precise enough for us to literally project the timing of Christ’s return.

As Jesus Himself said in Matthew 24:36, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”

Christ will bring real peace to the Middle East

Jesus Christ is returning to this earth to establish the Kingdom of God (Revelation 11:15). When we see these events happening, we will know the Kingdom is drawing near: “So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place... Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:31-32, 36).

—Isaac Khalil

For an overview of end-time events, download our free booklet The Book of Revelation: The Storm Before the Calm.
Hello! My name is Jeremy, and I make mistakes.
But, then, so do you. So does everyone, if we're being honest. “For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body” (James 3:2)

Sometimes we can get it into our heads that being a Christian means being flawless, but nothing could be further from the truth. Part of being a Christian in progress means understanding that not one of us is perfect—not you, not me, not anyone else besides God the Father and Jesus Christ. “For there is no difference,” wrote Paul, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:22-23).

Not some of us.
All of us.

That can be a depressing truth to grapple with, but here’s the upside:
God isn’t looking for Christians who never make mistakes. He’s looking for Christians who learn from their mistakes. And that’s something all of us can do.

Learning from mistakes requires effort
But here’s the thing: We don’t automatically learn from our mistakes.

That might feel counterintuitive, but it’s true—and important to keep in mind as we navigate this topic. It’s entirely possible to go through life without ever correcting course when we mess up.

Solomon put it this way: “As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly” (Proverbs 26:11). A graphic image, to be sure, but one that drives home the futility of making the same bad choices over and over again.

If we want to do better than Solomon’s proverbial dog, it’ll take effort from us—intentional, focused effort. Here are three steps to get us started:

1. **Call a spade a spade**
“Mistake” is an easy word to hide behind—but most of the time, a mistake is a bad decision, not the total accident it pretends to be. Sure, sometimes the consequences of that decision are unexpected, but the decision itself is still a choice we make.

   Own up to that.
   If we want to learn from mistakes, we have to start by being honest with ourselves. We have to be able to look at our blunders and admit not only, “This was a bad decision,” but, “This was a bad decision I made.”

   That’s the doorway to change. Once we’re willing to admit it to ourselves, we can admit it to God—and “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

   When we acknowledge our mistakes and seek to make course corrections, God is happy to clear our slate and help us start again.

2. **Identify your triggers**
Self-control isn’t always about staring down your temptations without flinching. There’s more...
just as discretion can be the better part of valor, sometimes a key component of self-control is learning to stay away from the things that can derail us.

Are there any mistakes you find yourself making over and over? Bad decisions you keep repeating, even though you’ve told yourself, “This has to stop”? Sometimes the key to breaking that cycle is taking a step back and figuring out why you keep going that route.

Right before you make that mistake, what are you usually doing? What are you thinking? What are you feeling? If you start seeing a recurring trigger that makes you more susceptible to making bad decisions, then it’s time to start tweaking variables.

Are there people or places you need to start avoiding? Distractions that you can distance yourself from, or at least make less accessible? Mental or physical exercises you can adopt to impact how you’re feeling or what you’re focusing on? Changes you can make in your daily routines or even your entertainment choices?

Once we can spot our triggers, we can take steps to minimize their impact—or cut them out of our lives entirely. Jesus told His disciples, “If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. … And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire” (Matthew 18:8-9).

(Our article “If Your Right Eye Causes You to Sin, Pluck It Out’: What Did Jesus Mean?” explains that this passage is about removing sin, not body parts. For more on what hellfire is and isn’t, see “What Is the Lake of Fire?”)

Satan knows your triggers, and he’ll expose you to them every chance he gets. The strength to say no and resist those triggers is important, but so is the wisdom to identify and avoid them whenever possible.

3. Learn from others’ mistakes

Paul, writing about the failings of Old Testament Israel, explained, “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:11-12).

It reminds me of the old Benjamin Franklin quote: “Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other.”

To put it another way: If we choose to learn from only our own mistakes, we’re in for a rough ride. The Bible is full of mistakes (and lessons) from the lives of those who came before us. And as much as the world has changed in the last few thousand years, human nature has stayed pretty much the same.

New clothes, new toys, new buildings, but it’s still the same old human beings doing the same old human things. That means the stories of the Bible aren’t just ancient history, but guides for avoiding modern-day pitfalls and making good decisions.

It’s never too late to get back up

You are a Christian who makes mistakes. So am I. But the Bible says, “A righteous man may fall seven times and rise again” (Proverbs 24:16). With God’s help through the Holy Spirit, we can be Christians who learn from those mistakes and never stop growing.

Get back up and keep moving forward.

For more on making the right decisions, read “Decision Making: 7 Steps for Christian Choices.”

—Jeremy Lallier

Have a topic you want to see tackled in this column? Send your suggestions anonymously through lifehopeandtruth.com/ideas.
The first thing most people notice about a giraffe is its enormous, six-foot-long neck craning up toward the sky.

What most people never know about are its two-foot-long, 25-pound heart, which God designed to keep blood flowing through its long-as-a-man-is-tall neck, and the special one-way valves in its jugular vein, which keep blood from pooling in its brain while it drinks.

Giraffes are engineering marvels that can weigh as much as 3,500 pounds, and an adult male will eat between 75 and 140 pounds of forage from tall bushes and thorny acacia trees every day. They are uniquely equipped to reach all this food with their long necks, 20-inch tongues, tough lips and unusual tooth arrangement.

Giraffes are, without a doubt, a true wonder of God’s creation.

Pictured: giraffe (Giraffa camelopardalis)

Photo by James Capo

Text by James Capo and Jeremy Lallier
Surprising Truths From the Olivet Prophecy: Lawlessness Will Abound

In Jesus’ Olivet discourse, He prophesied that in the end time lawlessness will abound. What does it mean to be lawless? Is lawlessness affecting your life?

In “The Rise of Counterfeit Christianity,” the previous installment of this series, we examined Christ’s warning about religious deception in the end times. We saw that the most dangerous form of religious deception in the end times would be a counterfeit version of Christianity (Matthew 24:4-5).

A few verses down, Jesus got more specific: “Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many” (verse 11, emphasis added throughout).

A little later He added more detail: “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders” (verse 24).

So the end time will be a time that some will consider to be a religious revival. There will be many religious teachers on the scene claiming to represent Jesus Christ—some performing supernatural miracles and some even claiming to be a Christlike figure themselves (see verse 24).

Jesus’ prophecy about “many false prophets” (verse 11) rising up is immediately followed by an important description about the consequence of their teachings: “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold” (verse 12).

What is lawlessness?
The Greek word translated “lawlessness” in the New King James Version is anomia. The word nomos means “law,” and the prefix a- means “without”—so the literal meaning of anomia is “without law.”

Jesus wasn’t talking about a breakdown of civil laws from national or local governments. The context of His statement was religion (verses 4-5, 11). So it’s clear Jesus was talking about the rejection of the law found in the Bible.

Later on, Paul used the same basic word, lawless, to describe the most powerful false religious teacher in the end times (2 Thessalonians 2:8-9). That man is further described as coming from a religious system labeled as “the mystery of lawlessness” (verse 7).

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus warned that those who will ultimately be rejected by God are those “who practice lawlessness” (Matthew 7:23; 13:41).

Jesus’ use of the word lawlessness teaches us very important truths that shouldn’t be controversial:

• Jesus was a proponent of the law of God.
• His life was governed by the law.
• He taught people to obey the law.

But the unfortunate truth is that those three statements are controversial within the realm of mainstream Christianity.
Christianity’s rejection of law

Sadly, when we look at many of the churches and teachers who claim the name of Jesus today, we overwhelmingly find them teaching lawlessness.

How can I say that? Don’t all churches support the 10 Commandments?

The answer is no. Not as Jesus did. One of His most complete statements on the subject is found early in the Sermon on the Mount. Speaking of the law of God, Jesus said, “Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18).

He went on to emphasize this point even more graphically: “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (verse 19).

This statement clarifies what Jesus meant when He used the word lawlessness in other places. Someone doesn’t have to reject each and every one of the 10 Commandments to be anomia (without law). To reject and teach against just one of God’s laws puts someone into the category of anomia.

Many years later, Jesus’ half-brother James wrote the same truth in slightly different words: “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

By this standard, almost every mainstream Christian church today would be considered lawless because they almost all universally reject, ignore or modify at least one of the laws of God: the Fourth Commandment that instructs us, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. … The seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God” (Exodus 20:8, 10).

But that’s not the only reason that today’s Christianity falls under the category of lawless. Many churches teach that the law was abolished by Jesus on the cross, instead of acknowledging that He actually taught a higher level of obedience, including the spiritual intent of the law. His followers are taught to obey in thoughts and actions (Matthew 5:21-48). The goal is for us to become perfect, like God (verse 48).

But throughout history, those who obeyed and taught the entire law of God have been persecuted and labeled with pejorative terms, just as Jesus predicted would happen (Matthew 24:9).

Increasing societal lawlessness

But we must also understand that lawlessness in the end times will go far beyond ignoring just one of the 10 Commandments. The “lawlessness” that Jesus said would cause the love of many to “grow cold” will lead to an almost total societal turn toward evil and wickedness. Jesus said it will be “as the days of Noah were” (Matthew 24:37). Then “every intent of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).

We live in a world filled with evil today, but as the apostle Paul wrote, “Evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse” (2 Timothy 3:13).

Yes, it is going to get worse. Much worse.

Just before that statement, Paul wrote of 19 characteristics that describe how corrupt and immoral people will be at that time. Nearly all of these 19 characteristics are a direct result of the rejection of God’s law—in other words, they are the direct consequences of a society that embraces lawlessness.

That society won’t just exist in one nation or culture, but will permeate the world and will make it so dangerous that it will require God’s direct intervention to save human beings from completely destroying themselves (Matthew 24:22).

Leaving lawlessness

There is good news. You don’t have to follow society’s slide into unrestrained lawlessness. You can choose to reject lawlessness and allow your life to be governed by the law of God. Those who obey God’s law will avoid having their love grow cold, because the entire purpose of the law of God is to help us show love to God and other people (1 John 5:3).

To learn how God’s law can change your life for the better and help you avoid being a part of society’s slide toward lawlessness, we recommend that you read our free booklet God’s 10 Commandments: Still Relevant Today.

—Erik Jones
My head snapped around, and without thinking, I crouched in fight-or-flight position. Fifteen yards away, a huge male hippopotamus had just lunged out of the Palala River, black eyes fixed on me, mouth impossibly open in a noisy explosion of water.

As I stepped back from the river bank, he slipped back beneath the surface. I looked at the ranger next to me. He had glanced at the hippo, before returning to the animal tracks he was following in the dirt.

Keeping my eye on the river, I kept the ranger between the water and me.

Danger lurks in Eden
In the pristine Waterberg Massif of South Africa, stream water is pure enough to drink without filtering. Baboons, monkeys, hyraxes, impalas, bushbuck, zebras, wildebeests and eland are plentiful.

Waterberg has been called an Eden, but not all the animals are placid. The leopard I heard rasping outside my rondavel the night before would not lie down with the kid. Voracious Nile crocodiles congregate in river pools.

While hiking, we watched constantly for rhinos. I was instructed always to have a tree to my front mentally selected, and if anyone yelled “rhino!” I was to sprint and climb my tree.

“But,” another hiker asked, “what if you find it’s a thorn tree?”

“If there’s a rhino,” the ranger assured, “you won’t notice the thorns.”

Back to the hippo
But at this precise moment, I was focused only on one conspicuous hippo. A big male with foot-long teeth can weigh 10,000 pounds, run more than 20 miles an hour and bite a crocodile (or a columnist) in half!

As he submerged, V-shaped ripples moved toward us. A few moments later I flinched again as the brute gave another explosive display of size and strength, much nearer than the last.

The ranger flashed a smile: “He’s just trying to scare you.”

I tried to smile back: “It’s working!”

He gestured to the vertical drop from the bank to the river. Hippos, it turns out, can’t jump. For all their size, a step up of even a yard or two puts them off. In spite of the aggressive spectacle, we had never been in any imminent danger.

A biblical key to courage
As the adrenaline in my blood slowly dissipated, a Bible passage came to mind. Our world is an increasingly frightening place; dangers lurk at home and abroad. Prophecies of what the Bible calls the end time show the world will grow immeasurably worse before it will get immeasurably better.

But the Bible says Christians shouldn’t fear: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:18-19).

When we comprehend the depth of God’s love for us, and the unlimited power He commands to act on that love, we know we are absolutely safe in His hands. People in the world—and our evil adversary—will try to frighten us, distract us into rash and wrong thoughts and actions. But nothing can prevent God from accomplishing His perfect will toward you and me. It is His “good pleasure” to give us His Kingdom (Luke 12:32).

So, rather than fearing the hippos of the world, we can take courage by concentrating on perfection in love: our growing love for God and His perfect love for us.

—Joel Meeker
@JoelMeeker
God wants you to experience a life full of meaning, satisfaction and joy. That life is possible!

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