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DISCERN

A Magazine of Life Hope & Truth



Why We Need

**SPIRITUAL
DISCERNMENT**

Now More Than Ever

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ideologies are spreading from the
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rivals. Where will this lead?

Discerning Between Good and Evil

If a prayer ever needed to be on the lips of people around the world, it's, "Please give me an understanding heart that I may be able to discern between good and evil!"

When Solomon asked that of God, the mantle of responsibility he bore as the new king of Israel weighed heavily. He knew that navigating his people through the many perils they faced—ranging from external enemies trying to destroy them to internal enemies bent on moral corruption—was a task larger than he himself could handle. So he wisely asked God not for riches or victories, but for wisdom and discernment.

Fast-forward to today.

As nations almost universally face the same foes, where are the modern Solomons? Who hears the voice of leaders humbly confessing, "O LORD my God . . . I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in"? Which leaders today plead with their people to turn to God?

Can you name any Solomons today offering God such entreaties—any Solomons whom God is granting "a wise and understanding heart"?

Stepping up to lead

Are you feeling weighed down by the growing perils of living in this dysfunctional world?

In the absence of virtually any solid leadership by our politicians, educators and—sad to say—even religious leaders, what is one to do?

Well, in times such as these, like Solomon, each of us has to step up to lead, not our nations, but ourselves. We must have the wisdom to navigate ourselves, and our families, through the physical, emotional and moral perils of this world. To do so, Solomon's prayer—"Help me to discern between good and evil!"—should be ever on our tongues.

Never underestimate Satan, the source of evil, and his powers of deception that make evil appear appealing, even logical, to all people. He has mastered wrapping wickedness in such alluring ways that we seldom resist opening the packages of sin. He doesn't care what you believe, what you do, what you think . . . as long as you don't believe God, do what He says or think His thoughts.

Under Satan's influence, our global society today looks eerily like a time preceding Solomon's: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." We love that freedom, but how well does it work out?

Well, today we're living in a fool's world of confusion and evil because, "the way of a fool is right in his own eyes," as Solomon bluntly put it.

The path to discernment

One path leads out of it, though. When we admit that we cannot guide our own steps and turn to God to seek His truth, to understand how to live by His words, He responds.


"Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding," God promises in Proverbs 2, "then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding . . . Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path."

With this issue, *Discern* is now 10 years old. Our magazine title is unusual. It's derived from numerous scriptures that tell us to do something: to *discern* good from evil. To that end, we share with you in these pages lessons we have learned, and continue to learn, in our quest for spiritual discernment.

Our lead article in this issue will give you much more to consider. And we hope you will continue walking with us in the years ahead, all the while echoing Solomon's appeal to God for the spiritual maturity to discern both good and evil, in order to choose the good!




Clyde Kilough
Editor



Our world is filled with schemes, scams and deceptions of almost every variety imaginable. Spiritual misinformation also runs rampant. What can we do?

Why We Need **SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT** Now More Than Ever



Ten years ago, in January 2014, this magazine made its debut. It was named *Discern* with the intent of helping readers find answers to mankind's most stubborn problems by identifying and applying timeless spiritual truths established by our Creator.

Since our hosting website—LifeHopeandTruth.com—existed before this magazine, we also contemplated naming our magazine Life, Hope & Truth. But after careful consideration, we settled on *Discern*. Our goal was to help people discern God's eternal values in all aspects of life.

A decade later, we remain steadfastly committed to our founding principles.

As Clyde Kilough, our editor, wrote in his inaugural “Consider This” column: “Let’s be upfront from the beginning—the unabashed purpose of this magazine, *Discern*, is to influence the way you think . . . just like everyone else in your life is trying to do . . .

“We don’t claim to have a corner on the market of knowledge. But we do know that humanity’s problems are spiritual in nature—they spring from misguided thinking and destructive attitudes. Hence, they must be met with spiritual solutions—changes in perception, understanding and attitude.”

Benefits of discernment

Why are we so committed to helping you discern the spiritual truth about what is moral and immoral,

and what is good and bad? It is because, as Paul stated, “Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

Discerning and then living by God’s guidance has benefits in both this life and the life to come.

As foretold in God’s Word, the world has made significant technological progress (Daniel 12:4). Yet, as also prophesied in the Holy Scriptures, humans still grapple with living peacefully with one another (Isaiah 59:8).

Ten years after the founding of this magazine, let’s consider current conditions.

The urgent need for discernment today

In our modern world, learning how to detect and protect ourselves from Internet scams is a vital skill. With unethical people continually setting traps for the vulnerable, knowing how to avoid providing personal information to online thieves is essential education for people learning to navigate our online society.

In years gone by, the ability to read people and avoid being taken advantage of was often referred to as being *streetwise*. This kind of discernment can be learned through personal experience, observation and knowledge acquired from others.

But there is an even more important type of discernment.

When Jesus walked the earth as a human, He distinguished between the skill of discerning the weather and a deeper form of discernment.

When confronted by the Pharisees and Sadducees who wanted Him to show them a miraculous sign, Jesus said, “When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; and in the morning, ‘It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Hypocrites! You know how to *discern* the face of the sky, but you cannot *discern* the signs of the times” (Matthew 16:2-3, emphasis added throughout).

What Jesus was saying to these Jewish religious leaders was that they lacked spiritual discernment. Had they been able to properly discern biblical prophecies regarding Him, they would not have needed for Him to perform a miracle to prove His identity.

It is important to note that these highly trained religious leaders had knowledge of the biblical prophecies. But they

didn’t have spiritual discernment—the ability to apply that knowledge to their current situation.

Now, let’s consider why we lack spiritual discernment and how we can obtain this important skill.

The natural lack of spiritual discernment

Today, it is commonly presumed that if we just look within ourselves, we can find all the answers to life’s important questions. In doing this, many believe they can find the moral values that are right for them. “Trust your heart,” they say. “Decide for yourself what feels right for you.”

Regrettably, what most people don’t realize is that this type of thinking is humanity’s oldest deception. Adam and Eve, the first humans, made this tragic mistake in the Garden of Eden.

Satan, the adversary of God and humans, appeared to Eve in the form of a snake. Using his deceptive tactics, he called God a liar for saying humans would die if they ate of the forbidden tree. He convinced Eve that she could decide for herself what was good and what was evil (Genesis 3:1-5).

Sadly, Eve was deceived. She fell for Satan’s deceptive pitch and thought she could make this decision by herself.

“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 2:14). Although this passage indicates that Adam wasn’t deceived by Satan that time, he foolishly decided to follow his wife’s example and likewise eat of the forbidden tree. His own misguided thinking led him astray.

Both Adam and Eve lacked the spiritual discernment they needed to make the right decision. As a result of their sin, they were driven out of the garden and, more important, lost access to the tree of life. That tree symbolized their opportunity to have eternal life (Genesis 3:23-24).

The limits of human reasoning

We humans—created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27)—were given marvelous abilities to think and reason. And it’s enticing to believe that we can independently determine moral values and solve all our problems apart from God.

But we humans simply weren’t equipped to inherently have sound spiritual discernment.



As the prophet Jeremiah exclaimed: “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). And as for our hearts, the same prophet wrote: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

Despite our deepest introspection, spiritual answers cannot be found within ourselves apart from God. As a result, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Satan’s continuing deception

Even though Satan is not talking to people today in exactly the same way he was talking to Eve, his goal of confusing and deceiving humans remains unchanged. Regrettably, he continues to succeed in his endeavors.

Revelation 12:9 explains that this evil being “deceives the whole world.” This sentiment is echoed in 1 John 5:19: “The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.”

The apostle Paul admitted, “Sin . . . deceived me” (Romans 7:11). Hebrews similarly warns of “the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). Just as Satan made

sin look attractive to Eve, he makes sin look appealing to humanity today.

We share a common weakness with Adam, Eve, Paul and every other human being—we have all fallen victim to deception, by Satan and our own misguided thinking.

Attaining the gift of spiritual discernment

When God calls us, He opens our minds to the reality of our deception. If we repent of our sins and commit our lives to Him through baptism, we can receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

God’s Holy Spirit is described as a spirit “of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). A mind aided by God’s Spirit can discern what is true and what is not. This is why the apostle John referred to the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17; 15:26). And of special importance, he wrote that “the Spirit of truth . . . will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

Paul likened our natural state to having a veil over our minds that obstructs the understanding of spiritual matters. However, he also noted that “the veil

is taken away in Christ . . . when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2 Corinthians 3:14, 16).

Seeking and maintaining spiritual discernment

Spiritual discernment is a gift from God that must be continually sought and applied. Proverbs 2:3 admonishes us to “cry out for *discernment*,” and Hebrews 5:14 speaks of mature Christians exercising their senses “to *discern* both good and evil.”

Paul told the Philippian brethren that he prayed that their “love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all *discernment*” (Philippians 1:9).

The need for spiritual discernment in the future

Jesus emphasized the critical need for spiritual discernment as we approach the conclusion of this present age, just before Christ’s return.

In His Olivet Discourse, while addressing end-time conditions, Jesus said, “Take heed that no one *deceives* you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will *deceive* many” (Matthew 24:4-5).

While religious deception has been going on for a long time, it is prophesied to intensify in the end times.

In the unfolding of end-time events, a human—referred to variously as the man of sin, the lawless one and the false prophet—will be given the ability to perform astounding miracles for the purpose of deceiving people. He will be equipped with these supernatural powers for the purpose of deceiving others (Revelation 19:20).

Describing this man’s deceptive powers, Paul wrote: “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10).

Jesus also forewarned of these deceptive miracles, saying, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24).

Why might the elect—those chosen by God and considered special by Him—be vulnerable to deception? The answer lies in the supernatural nature of miracles, which transcend the natural realm and suggest the presence of an unseen power.

How to increase our spiritual discernment

Given the certainty of these future miraculous occurrences, how will the elect be able to discern that these amazing signs performed by the false prophet are not from God, and that they should not follow this individual?

The people of God will have spiritual discernment and will be well-versed in God’s Word. They will understand that Satan and his demons can perform supernatural acts. They will also recall God’s warning to the ancient Israelites: If a prophet announces a sign or wonder that comes to pass and then advocates the worship of other gods, they should not heed that prophet (Deuteronomy 13:1-3).

Furthermore, the people of God endowed with discernment in the end times will heed John’s counsel: “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

One especially important way to determine whether a prophet is genuine or an imposter is to assess whether his message aligns with the teachings of the Bible. For additional ways to discern between a false prophet and a true prophet of God, see our article “[False Prophets](#).”

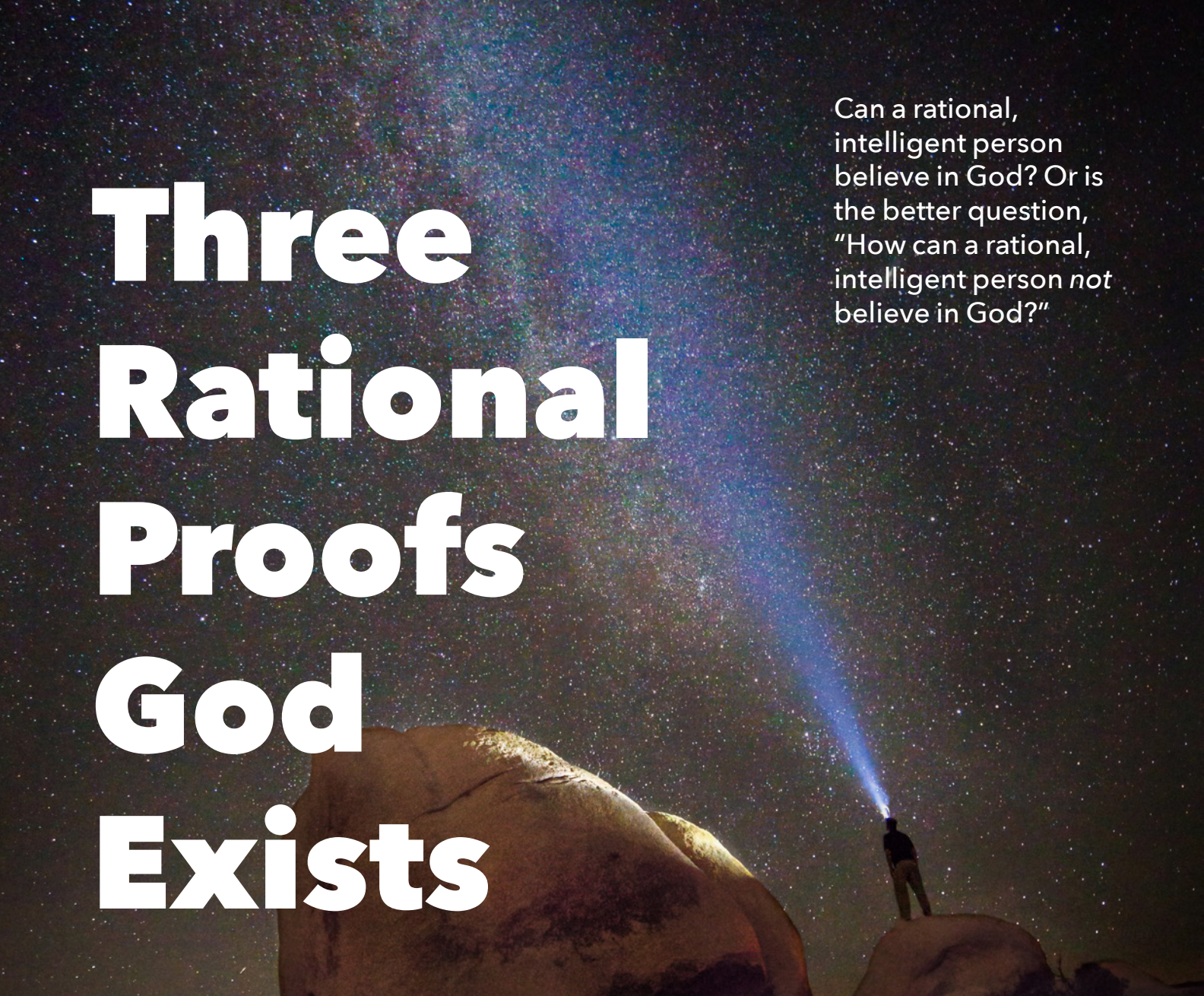
Take action to improve your spiritual discernment

To foster your growth in spiritual discernment, we recommend the following:

- Regularly seek God’s help and wisdom through prayer (Proverbs 2:3).
- Live by what you discover in the Bible (Psalm 111:10). Our [Change Your Life](#) booklet is a valuable resource.
- Take the free [Bible Study Course](#) to gain a comprehensive understanding of God’s instructions.
- Continue reading *Discern* magazine for biblical insights into God’s expectations of us.
- If you have questions, contact us for biblically based answers.

Our sincere wish for each of you, our cherished readers, is that you will grow in spiritual discernment and be counted among the elect at the return of Christ.

—David Treybig

A person stands on a rocky outcrop, shining a flashlight into a vast, starry night sky. The beam of light illuminates a path through the darkness, symbolizing the search for truth or understanding. The background is a deep, dark blue and black, filled with countless stars and a faint, colorful nebula or galaxy structure.

Three Rational Proofs God Exists

Can a rational, intelligent person believe in God? Or is the better question, “How can a rational, intelligent person *not* believe in God?”

If God exists, then He is stunningly powerful. He is the Author, Creator and Ruler of the universe.

But the late physicist Stephen Hawking said that science has made God “unnecessary.”

He said, “The laws of physics can explain the universe without the need for a Creator.”

Is that true?

Examining the evidence

The laws of physics explain how the cosmos works, but physics doesn’t explain how the cosmos came to be, or who wrote the laws of physics.

The great physicist Albert Einstein acknowledged that “everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe—a spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble.”

Now, Einstein may not have believed in a God who is active in personal lives, as described in the Bible. But he recognized there is a spirit, superior to man, that animated the cosmos.

Scientists of all stripes are recognizing there is incredible, complex design throughout the universe—and

in even the most basic of cells and molecules. It's design that defies explanations that it all came about by random chance. Design that points to an intelligent Designer.

Scientific materialists like Richard Dawkins tell us that they can explain the appearance of design by purely naturalistic means—by random chance and natural selection. But do their elaborate theories fall apart under scrutiny?

The more scientists have studied, the more obvious the evidence for design is. From the discovery of the complex coding of information written into the DNA of every living cell, to the fine-tuning of the laws that govern the cosmos, the evidence of forethought, planning and design is clearly there.

Einstein is credited with having said:

“In view of such harmony in the cosmos which I, with my limited human mind, am able to recognize, there are yet people who say there is no God. But what makes me really angry is that they quote me for support of such views.”

This echoes the words of the Bible in Romans 1:20: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse” (New International Version).

Let’s look more closely at three things that give us evidence that God exists.

1. Creation requires a Creator

First, let’s look at the very existence of the physical universe itself. How did it come to be?

Frankly, the materialistic ideas that have been proposed to explain how this cosmos came to be require some major theoretical leaps. The idea is that there must be natural laws explaining it all, but that they simply haven’t been proven or perhaps even discovered yet.

But the physics and cosmology that we *do* know describe a universe coming into existence in a “big bang”—a cosmic explosion of everything, out of nothing—about 13.8 billion years ago.

The common idea in science before the 1920s was that matter had simply always existed.

But all the scientific disciplines soon came to acknowledge the clear evidence that the universe

was expanding, and that meant the universe had a beginning.

The theory was strongly confirmed in 1965 with the discovery of the cosmic microwave background—a faint radiation that represents the afterglow of the big bang.

Scientists have tried to reverse engineer the expanding universe to a point about 13.8 billion years ago, when the known laws of physics wouldn’t have worked—when gravity and light and time would have, in a sense, all been collapsed into an infinitesimally small, immensely hot and infinitely dense singularity. According to Big-Bang-Theory.com, “Singularities are zones which defy our current understanding of physics . . . Where did it come from? We don’t know. Why did it appear? We don’t know.”

And for some unexplained reason, 13.8 billion years ago that singularity exploded, giving us the origin of the universe—the big bang.

Now, logically, if the universe had a beginning, then it had to have a Beginner—an Originator—no matter how long ago that may have been. Genesis 1:1 simply says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Scripture doesn’t put a time limit on that. Our article “[The Gap Theory](#)” explains this verse that is often misunderstood.

The mere existence of matter, energy and time, with all our current understanding of physics and cosmology, points to a creation, and so, a Creator.

Now to be fair, the most recent images being received by the James Webb Space Telescope seem to be challenging some of the assumptions made in the big bang theory, finding galaxies that seem to be too old to fit the model of the big bang.

One idea to explain this is that there have been repeated pulses of a cosmic big bang, followed by collapse, and another big bang.

Another idea is that there are actually multiverses—not one, but many universes.

Such materialistic explanations of how we can have a creation without a Creator don’t answer the fundamental problem. If you can’t explain the origin of even one universe, how do you explain the origin of many?

If we have matter, time and energy that at some point didn’t exist, then we need something (or Someone) that is not limited by matter, time and energy to bring them into existence.

2. Design is evidence of an intelligent Designer

But let's assume that somehow everything did explode into existence out of nothing. Where did the order and structure that we see in the universe come from?

When's the last time you witnessed an explosion that generated order instead of chaos? If you blow up a bridge, you don't end up with a skyscraper.

To create order requires intelligence, forethought and design. And our universe is incredibly fine-tuned in its design.

So, what caused all the stuff in the big bang to organize? That takes a mind to design.

And we see functional design throughout the universe, from flower petals to planets.

Scientists well understand that when you have a functional pattern, it indicates an intelligence that made it. An entire field of research is based on this.

As part of the SETI project—the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence—27 large radio antennas are spread out over the high desert near Socorro, New Mexico. These antennas are scanning the sky 24/7, looking for some pattern to emerge from the random background radiation waves in the cosmos.

Why? Because the researchers know that if they identify such a pattern, they will have found evidence of intelligence in the universe.

It is ironic that, on the one hand, scientists are looking for any indication of a recognizable pattern in the radio waves of space to show that there is intelligent life out there. And yet, faced with an incredibly complex code that we now understand is written into the DNA of every living cell, scientists believe it all could have happened by accident, without the guidance of an intelligent Being to write the code.

When you see order, when you see functional design, the rational conclusion is that it was put together by an intelligent being.

Design found in nature is far more complex than any design man has come up with.

The design of a bird is far more complex than the design of a plane. But materialists say that the plane was designed by aeronautical engineers, while the bird happened by chance.

Physics, the fine-tuning of gravity, the laws of chemistry and biology, the incredible digital code

found in DNA—all these reveal patterns and design that could not happen without an intelligent Designer.

3. Our minds are evidence of a greater mind

In this short article, we can't examine all the other evidence for the Creator who made life with all its wonders and irreducible complexity. But let's consider one more rational proof of a rational Creator, and that's the very ability we have to reason.

Creation requires a Creator, and design requires a Designer.

And even though rational, intelligent human beings can disagree, as I know some will, we can still reason together on the arguments—we can think.

How could *chemicals* randomly develop *consciousness*?

In a TED Talk, brain researcher V.S. Ramachandran mused:

"Think for a minute about what this entails. Here is this . . . three-pound mass of jelly you can hold in the palm of your hand, and it can contemplate the vastness of the interstellar space. It can contemplate the meaning of infinity and it can contemplate itself, contemplating on the meaning of infinity. And this peculiar recursive quality that we call self-awareness, which I think is the holy grail of neuroscience, of neurology, and hopefully, someday, we'll understand how that happens."

The Bible provides a rational explanation of the mystery of the human mind. God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26).

Part of being like God is the ability to think, reason and have the capacity for intelligence.

Our ability to reason is a testimony to the Author of life. It is evidence of the existence of an intelligent Creator.

Without that ability to reason, we would not be able to have a relationship with God—and God desires to have a relationship with us.

So He gave you a mind that is—at least in a small way—like His. And He asks you to use it—to reason together with Him, to get to know Him and to have a relationship with Him.

You can know that God exists. Download our study guide [*Does God Exist?*](#)

—James Capo



Are Aliens Real?

Recent U.S. intelligence reports have brought renewed attention to the prospect of alien life. Is the earth being visited by extraterrestrials?

In the foreground of an old photo is a protester and his picket sign: “UFOS ARE REAL & THE GOVERNMENT KNOWS IT!” The shot, which recently resurfaced, came from a public demonstration in 1995. Back then, beliefs in extraterrestrial life and alien technology seemed less plausible than they do now.

The topic has moved from society’s fringes to inside the halls of Congress. More and more people are giving weight to the possible existence of aliens.

Are you convinced one way or the other? Is there any way to know for sure?

Claims of extraterrestrial encounters

David Grusch, a former member of the Pentagon’s UAP (Unidentified Aerial Phenomena) Task Force, has said some truly extraordinary things. The ex-intelligence official stated before Congress, “I was informed, in the course of my official duties, of a multi-decade UAP

crash retrieval and reverse-engineering program.”

Put more simply, he claimed that the U.S. has secretly been collecting and studying crashed UFOs for decades.

Grusch also claimed to have interviewed multiple “high-level intelligence officials” who had “direct knowledge” of the alien craft from these alleged crash sites. But his response to a question about whether bodies of pilots had ever been found in these crafts was particularly startling: “Biologics came with some of these recoveries . . . [They were] nonhuman, and that was the assessment of people with direct knowledge on the program I talked to.”

Could it really be that the U.S. government is hiding evidence of extraterrestrial life?

Congressman Tim Burchett, who headed the investigation, thanked Grusch for his testimony and said, “We’re just going to get to the facts. We’re going to uncover the cover-up.”

Several reputable news outlets have treated this issue of extraterrestrials very seriously, at a time when about two-thirds (65 percent) of Americans already believe that intelligent life exists on other planets (Pew Research Center).

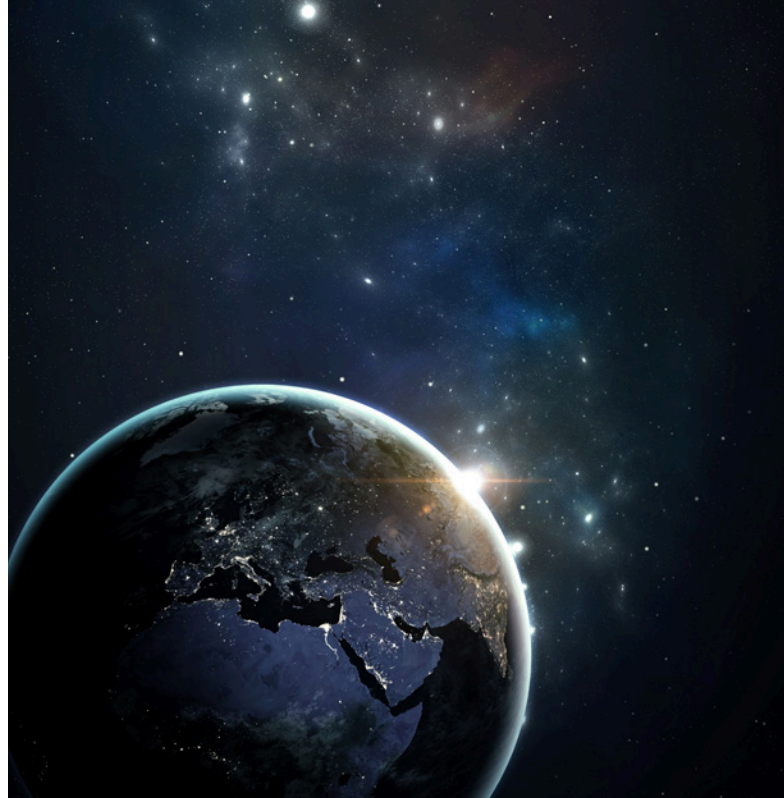
However, Grusch provided no hard evidence to back up his claims, only hearsay. Much of his testimony was based on secondhand knowledge. Grusch indicated that he himself had never seen an alien body or any part of any alleged government-recovered aircraft. In fact, no one, in all of these years, has ever produced evidence that human beings have connected with alien life and technology—let alone that a secret government program exists to handle such encounters.

However, there is a source that gives a definitive answer. We can know that intelligent life did not evolve on other planets by looking into the inspired Word of God.

The doctrinal problem with aliens

Belief in aliens is based on the idea that life evolved in different places in the universe. But that contradicts what the Bible tells us about the Creator and diminishes what He says about humanity and the unique potential He gave us.

Think about how much of the first two chapters in the Bible is dedicated to the creation of man. Only *man* was made in God’s image. Only man can talk, reason,



reflect, form relationships, imagine, build, plan, laugh, enjoy music and read books. Man has abilities that no other physical creature has!

When God inspired the creation account to be written, He was making a statement on the significance and potential of man. (To learn more about mankind’s potential, see our booklet [God’s Purpose for You](#).)

David recognized the immense value God placed on human beings. “You have crowned [man] with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet” (Psalm 8:5-6).

What we find in Scripture is that earth is at the center of God’s plan. It was on earth that God made man. It was on earth that God sacrificed His Son. It was on earth that Christ began His Church. It will be on earth that Jesus establishes His Kingdom. It will be on earth that the saints rule alongside Him. The only place in the universe given attention to throughout the Word of God is earth.

The Bible mentions no other inhabited planets.

So, then, is there anyone out there besides us?

But it would be incorrect to believe that humans are *completely* alone. The Bible says that many intelligent, nonhuman life-forms are among us now. They don’t, however, originate from distant planets, but from the *spirit world*.

The Bible talks sparingly about the spirit world, but enough for us to know it exists and occasionally intervenes in the physical realm. The Bible reveals two orders of existence in the spirit world.

God the Father and Jesus Christ make up the highest and most supreme order. They are *eternal* beings, responsible for creating everything there is (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-3).

A lower order is composed of angels—and Hebrews suggests that there are millions, if not billions, of them.

In Genesis, we find several accounts where human beings have a direct encounter with God or one of His angels (for example, Genesis 18:1-2).

In fact, the author of Hebrews reminds us that these interactions still take place today. “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing *some have unwittingly entertained angels*” (Hebrews 13:2, emphasis added throughout). These encounters are probably few and far between, but they demonstrate how man will occasionally come in contact with the spirit world.

Of course, Scripture also sheds light on the sinister activity of Satan and the demons, who have a diabolical intelligence. They are never up to anything good. We know they can converse with humans (1 Samuel 28:13-20) and possess humans at times (Acts 16:16-18). They are also sometimes responsible for global conflicts (Daniel 10:13).

In these regards, mankind is very much in company with other intelligent beings.

What about UFOs?

Given the very real spirit world, some speculate that UFOs are actually demonic manifestations. This is easier to believe than activity from an unknown alien species.

But is it true?

The Pentagon’s office for investigating potential UFO sightings has received hundreds of reports since its inception in 2022. While some see the surge in reports as proof that aliens are becoming more interested in earth, officials see it as a result of efforts to “destigmatize the topic of UAP and instead recognize the potential risks” associated with aircraft safety and foreign surveillance.

But what do the reports reveal about the nature of these sightings?

Unsurprisingly, hardly anything at all.

According to the unclassified “2022 Annual Report

on Unidentified Aerial Phenomena,” the majority of these cases exhibit “unremarkable characteristics” (p. 6). What people thought were UFOs were actually drones, balloons, clutter, weather phenomena and even birds. Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security Ronald Moultrie made this comment: “We have not seen anything that would . . . lead us to believe that any of the objects that we have seen are of alien origin, if you will.”

While some leaked videos do seem to show objects that behave unnaturally, we just can’t be sure whether they are of demonic origin or not. It’s certainly within the realm of possibility—that much we can say.

Satan and his demons are powerful—and they have destructive motives. They can manipulate physical objects and appear to human beings in a variety of ways. Tying with mankind by displaying unexplainable aerial phenomena seems to be right up their alley. But, again, it’s up for debate.

What we do know is that, as the world draws closer to its prophesied end, supernatural signs are going to increase. Satan and his henchmen will use miracles and wondrous displays to induce an unprecedented level of human deception (Revelation 13:13).

Our job is not to get swept off our feet by impressive sights, but to stay focused on Christ’s imminent return (Mark 13:22-23). That will be the day when we get answers to all kinds of inexplicable events we have witnessed over the years.

God equips us with the knowledge we need

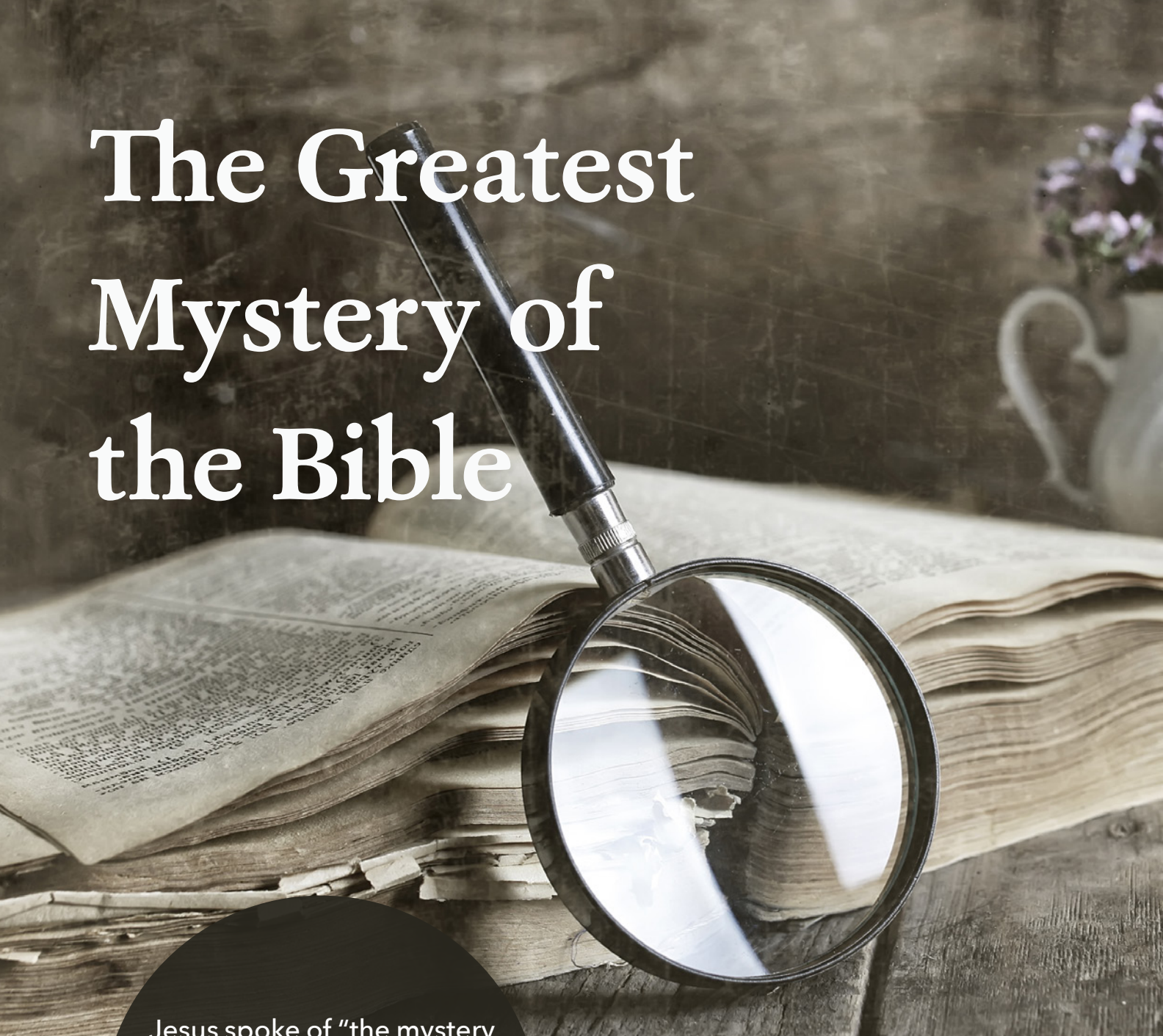
The question of extraterrestrial life and UFOs has a long history. While UAP sightings will always spark debate and intrigue, the Bible gives every Christian the perspective he or she needs on the subject.

Human beings, not little green men from some faraway place, are the focal point of God’s wonderful plan of salvation. Earth is where He is carrying that plan out. The gift of eternal life is offered to us and only us, the only intelligent life in the physical world. And one day, we will see God face-to-face, along with the countless millions of angels who are in His company.

Then we will be able to understand more of the mysteries of the vast universe.

—Kendrick Diaz

The Greatest Mystery of the Bible

A magnifying glass with a dark handle and a silver-colored frame is positioned over an open, thick, antique book. The book's pages are yellowed and show signs of age. The magnifying glass's lens is focused on the text, which is partially visible but mostly obscured by the glass. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a wooden table, with a small white ceramic cup and some purple flowers visible in the upper right corner.

Jesus spoke of "the mystery of the kingdom of God." Paul also wrote about the mysteries of God. What are these mysteries, and what do they mean for us?

After Jesus finished teaching a crowd assembled at the water's edge, He left the sea and the people behind and gathered in private with His closest disciples. They were still struggling to understand one of His parables, so they asked Jesus to explain it.

“To you,” He answered, “it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables” (Mark 4:11).

What is the mystery Christ mentioned, and why were most people prevented from understanding it? The answer is part of the greatest mystery of the Bible!

The Greek word for *mystery*

The English word *mystery* comes from the Greek word *mystērion*. *Mystērion* and its variants appear 27 times in the New Testament. Although we derive the English word from the Greek, the words’ meanings are not the same.

According to *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary*, in the New Testament *mystērion* “denotes, not the mysterious (as with the English word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation.”

Vine’s goes on to explain that the New Testament *mystērion* can be understood only by those people in whom God’s Holy Spirit works.

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible clarifies the meaning, stating that the word “often refers to a misunderstood part of the Old Testament that, with Christ’s coming, is now unveiled.”

Critical to understanding these mysteries, then, are Jesus Christ’s first coming to earth and the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit.

A mystery determined before the ages

In a letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul compared worldly wisdom with the wisdom of God, explaining that he and his companions in the ministry “speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory” (1 Corinthians 2:7).

Note that this wisdom existed “before the ages,” that it had been “hidden,” and that even as Paul addressed the subject, he spoke about it “in a mystery.” What this means is that the mystery pertains to something God had long before determined, but that His full intent had remained hidden from humans up to that time.

The preceding chapter sheds some light on this mystery. Paul wrote about the inability of both Jews and gentiles to believe in a crucified Messiah. That

concept was “to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

A crucified Messiah is at the core of this mystery. In essence, the Jews looked for a conquering Messiah, one who would restore their nation to its privileged position among the nations of the world. On top of that, crucifixion was considered a curse, an unthinkable fate for their version of the Messiah.

For the gentiles, there was a sharp divide between the physical and spiritual realms. They could not conceive of a god becoming human, or even caring enough about humans to do so. (See our article “[Christ Crucified: Stumbling Block, Folly or Wisdom of God?](#)” to learn more about this subject.)

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul confirmed that the coming of Christ was essential for the mysteries of God to be understood: “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest” (Romans 16:25-26).

What are the main mysteries of the Bible?

Most of the 27 uses of *mystērion* and its variants in the New Testament deal with truths that have long been hidden from most of humanity and even from most of God’s chosen nation Israel. (A handful of uses in the book of Revelation, however, refer to specific symbols in John’s visions.)

For instance, Paul uses the word in reference to the resurrection and transformation of the saints at the return of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). At the time of Christ’s ministry on earth, many of the religious leaders, mostly Sadducees, did not believe in the resurrection.

In another epistle, Paul used *mystērion* in reference to the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church, comparing this relationship to marriage (Ephesians 5:32). Although some Old Testament passages refer to Israel as a bride (Jeremiah 2:1-2, 32), the image was used to highlight the nation’s idolatry (verse 11). In Paul’s use, the emphasis is on the closeness, or intimacy, of the marriage relationship as a picture of the spiritual relationship.

“The mystery of lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:7) is another hidden truth to which Paul alludes. For anyone

who believes in an all-powerful and loving God, the existence of evil is perplexing, particularly the evil of the end times.

Paul also wrote about God's extension of His grace to the gentiles as a mystery in light of the hardening of hearts among the people of Israel (Romans 11:25). In fact, Paul felt "great sorrow and continual grief" for his own people (Romans 9:2). He even said, "I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren" (verse 3).

So these are some of the main mysteries discussed in the New Testament. Is there a thread that links them? Yes!

Revealing the greatest mystery of the Bible

That thread is God's plan of salvation! All of these mysteries are connected to His plan. In fact, God's plan of salvation *is* the greatest mystery of the Bible.

Salvation comes through a crucified Christ, and salvation includes the resurrection and transformation of the saints of God. Salvation includes acceptance into an intimate family relationship with God. And God's plan of salvation is established according to His timing and grace. (To learn more about God's plan of salvation, see our article "[Plan of Salvation: How God's Festivals Reveal His Plan](#).")

Jesus, in His earthly ministry, began to reveal this mystery. In a prayer recorded by one of His disciples, Jesus thanked God for hiding His identity and mission "from the wise and prudent" and for revealing "them to babes" (Matthew 11:25).

Not everyone understood, even in the presence of Jesus Christ. Not everyone understands even now. The apostle John wrote of the inability of some people to understand the mysteries of God, even after the appearance of Christ in the world: "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:5).

Clearly, the coming of Christ in the first century, though a prerequisite to understanding, is not the only factor to unlocking this mystery.

The Holy Spirit and the mysteries of God

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote of "the mystery . . . which in other ages was not made known

to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 3:3-5). This mystery was not revealed until after the Word had become flesh, and even then, only through the power of God's Holy Spirit.

By coming into this world and dying for us, Jesus paved the way for humans to have God's Holy Spirit dwell within them (Romans 8:9). That's why the night before He was crucified, Jesus promised His disciples that they would be given the Holy Spirit, which "will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26).

What does this mean for you and for me?

We can come to understand the greatest mystery of the Bible, God's plan of salvation. Doing so does not require graduate degrees in biblical studies or theology, but there are some conditions that must be met.

First, no one can understand these mysteries or begin this journey of faith unless God the Father draws that person (John 6:44). Second, a person must believe in Jesus and His message (John 7:38; Mark 1:15).

Third, that individual must recognize his or her sins and repent of them (Acts 2:38). Fourth, that person must be baptized (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27), and finally, a minister of Jesus Christ must lay hands on that individual, praying for the person to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18). That Spirit is a down payment on salvation (Ephesians 1:14).

If you go through this process, you can grow in the most important wisdom and knowledge (Ephesians 1:17-21). And you can develop a deeper understanding of the greatest mystery of the Bible: God's wonderful plan of salvation!

With this understanding, you can come to appreciate why some people are called now but others aren't. You can know the purpose of the resurrection and transformation of the saints. You can even come to know why such a wonderful God allows evil in our present world.

As a result of understanding the mystery of God's plan of salvation, you can take joy in the sure promises of God in calling you to be part of His family.

Study further in our free booklets [Change Your Life](#) and [From Holidays to Holy Days: God's Plan for You](#).

—Bill Palmer



The idea of the law of attraction can be found in both New Age and self-help literature. But does this so-called law align with the truth of the Bible?

Is the Law of Attraction Biblical?

In 2006, *The Secret* was published. The book, written by Rhonda Byrne, has sold over 30 million copies and was turned into a Hollywood movie in 2020.

The Secret made bold claims that garnered attention. It claimed to unveil an ancient secret that, when tapped into, could bring “health, wealth and happiness.”

The book’s first chapter quickly revealed the secret: “The Secret is the law of attraction!” The author claimed that this supposed law determined “the complete order in the Universe” and is just as universal and powerful as gravity.

The book asserts that this law is found in the sacred writings of nearly all of the world’s religions—including the Bible.

For Christians, this bold claim naturally begs the question: Is the law of attraction in the Bible?

What exactly is the law of attraction?

The concept is based on metaphysical ideas of mystical energies that supposedly reside in all living things.

In her book, Ms. Byrne says that every person has powerful internal energies that are released through thoughts. She claims that what we think, positive or negative, is released out of us into the universe as positive or negative energy.

The Secret describes the power of thoughts this way: “Thoughts are magnetic . . . As you think, those thoughts are sent out into the Universe, and they

magnetically attract all *like* things that are on the same frequency. Everything sent out returns to the source. And that source is You” (p. 10).

This is where *attraction* supposedly comes into play. If you think negatively (about things you don’t want), you will attract negative experiences. If you think positively (about what you desire), you’ll attract positive experiences.

For example, if you constantly worry about failure, you’ll attract negative experiences that will cause you to fail. Conversely, if you think and feel thoughts of joy and gratitude, you’ll attract positive experiences that will result in success.

The Secret sums up the idea like this: “The law of attraction simply gives you whatever it is you are thinking about” (p. 13). Through the universe’s power, thoughts become things and experiences. The author makes no apologies for the idea sounding self-centered: “You deserve all good things life has to offer . . . All good things are your birthright!” (p. 41).

How does Ms. Byrne suggest people tap into this universal law? Three basic steps are offered in the book:

1. Determine exactly what you want, and ask the universe for it.
2. Believe you will receive it by constantly thinking and speaking about your request.
3. Manifest the feelings and emotions you will have once you achieve your desire. (This is often done through verbal affirmations expressing gratitude for what you want as if you have already received it.)

According to its advocates, practicing this law will, without exception, lead to success and attainment in all aspects of life—wealth, relationships, careers and personal fulfillment.

Rational thinkers have looked at these claims and labeled this a pseudoscience. There’s no scientific evidence that thoughts attract energies from the universe.

The law of attraction is similar to the law of karma. The main difference is that karma focuses on consequences from energy released by actions, while the law of attraction focuses on energy released by thoughts. (To learn more, read “[Is Karma in the Bible?](#)”)

The law of attraction’s other forms

When one reads *The Secret*, it becomes obvious that the book draws heavily from Eastern philosophy and New Age concepts.

Other literature it draws from is less obvious. However, forms of the law of attraction have been promoted in self-help publications for years.

One of the idea’s earlier advocates was Napoleon Hill, author of *Think and Grow Rich* (1937). Mr. Hill taught that desires are the key to success. He claimed that, using the subconscious mind, people can attract anything they want if they believe and focus hard enough on it.

Think and Grow Rich maintains: “POVERTY is attracted to the one whose mind is favorable to it, as money is attracted to him whose mind has been deliberately prepared to attract it” (e-book edition, p. 153).

Norman Vincent Peale, an American pastor, wrote *The Power of Positive Thinking* in 1952. Though he used more biblical terminology, his philosophy was similar. He syncretized many of the mystical elements with religious concepts like prayer. For example, his book asserts: “Prayer power is a manifestation of energy” (e-book edition, p. 57) and “the human brain can send off power by thoughts and prayers” (p. 71). He encouraged his readers to repeatedly verbalize motivational scriptures as affirmations to receive power (p. 22).

Deepak Chopra, Oprah Winfrey and Tony Robbins are among the idea’s modern proponents. Like Norman Vincent Peale in the 1950s, Joel Osteen has syncretized the idea with Christian terminology in books like *The Power of I Am* and *The Abundance Mind-Set*.

The main error of the law of attraction

The law of attraction teaches that the mind emits energy that attracts the powers of the universe. This idea is foreign to the Bible.

The human mind does have amazing abilities made possible by [the spirit in man](#) (1 Corinthians 2:11). These abilities include intellect, creativity and planning. However, the spirit in man does not empower the mind to broadcast energy into the universe.

According to the Bible, the ability to make things happen by thought alone is reserved only for the spirit realm. Through the power of His Spirit, God can project His will throughout the universe (Psalms 33:9; 139:7). Satan can project sinful thoughts and attitudes through the air (Ephesians 2:2). However, human beings have no such power.

Ideas that the mind can mystically extend itself outside of the body are humanly devised fictions in man’s attempt to attain the powers of the spirit realm.

How does the law of attraction contradict the Bible?

We find several serious conflicts when we examine the idea in the light of the Bible.

- 1. The law of attraction attributes divine powers to the universe.** The idea that our mind's energies attract positive or negative consequences from the universe imbues the universe with the power to bless and curse. This ascribes God's power to the physical universe (see Romans 1:25). Christians seek blessings from God, not the universe (Isaiah 41:10; 2 Corinthians 9:8; James 1:17).
- 2. The law of attraction is based on thoughts and feelings—not righteousness.** The law of attraction claims that good or bad things happen to us because of our thoughts and feelings. However, the Bible doesn't promise blessings for merely thinking positively.
God is concerned with our *living* righteously. Instead of seeking success through positive thinking and manifestation, we should focus on pleasing God with righteous conduct and thinking (Psalm 15:1-3; Proverbs 16:7; Micah 6:8).
- 3. The law of attraction ignores God's will and the realities of this world.** The law of attraction claims we can get anything we want by just thinking positively and desiring it. However, this ignores the fact that God has a larger plan for us that may not include *everything* we desire. God never promised anyone a life without difficulties—no amount of positive thinking will prevent trials and personal failures (Psalm 34:19; John 16:33; James 1:3).
Proverbs 19:21 assures us that the will of God will always stand regardless of how positively we think about our goals: "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the LORD's counsel—that will stand."
- 4. The law of attraction centers on the self and promotes covetousness.** The law of attraction often encourages people to focus on themselves and their desires. It's all about how people can achieve what they *want*. However, the Bible labels self-centered covetousness as a sin (Colossians 3:5).
Instead, God encourages us to work hard, be content and have an others-first attitude. The desire for physical achievement and gain should

never take precedence over the Kingdom of God, righteous living and serving others (Matthew 6:33; Romans 12:13).

Goal setting and positivity in proper perspective

We are not arguing that setting goals and being positive are wrong.

Having clear goals is essential to both physical and spiritual success. Without goals, we'll live aimlessly and end up wherever the winds of life take us.

The Bible presents planning, or goal setting, as a principle for success (Proverbs 21:5; 24:27). Diligent people map out their life goals and make plans to accomplish them. The benefit of goals (big and small) is that they help us direct our decisions and plans. Successful companies have strategic plans to help them achieve their mission and goals. Likewise, individuals should have goals and make tangible plans to accomplish them.

There is no mystical secret to success in life. Physical success comes from setting goals, planning, working diligently and being resourceful when problems arise. Of course, for Christians, all of this should be done while seeking guidance and help from the Creator God (Psalm 37:4; Isaiah 55:6).

The Bible also encourages us to think positively. In Philippians 4, Paul tells us to avoid anxious thoughts and lists eight principles for *spiritually* positive thinking (verses 6 and 8). Wallowing in a cesspool of negativity is not good for our physical, mental or spiritual health. However, the Bible doesn't teach us to be artificially positive to the point of ignoring the realities of life in this world.

Instead of ignoring all negativity, the Bible says a wise person "foresees evil and hides himself" (Proverbs 27:12). In order to practice that principle, we have to consider potential negative outcomes or pitfalls and take precautions to avoid them.

The core difference between the Bible and the law of attraction is that the Bible attaches no mystical powers to goal setting or positivity. Goals and spiritually positive thinking should be part of a God-centered life, not self-centered mysticism.

The law of attraction is not biblical and should hold no attraction for Christians.

—Erik Jones



America: Exporting Radical Social Ideologies to the World

Radical social and political ideologies are spreading from the United States and separating it from allies, while emboldening rivals. Where will this lead?

America is the world's biggest billboard and an unparalleled cultural hyperpower. The export of American culture through entertainment, business, communications and social networks means that nothing that happens in America stays in America. This unprecedented soft power has global ripples, and other nations are impacted by the tide of American trends.

"America's traditions," according to an Oct. 27, 2022, *Wall Street Journal* editorial, "made our culture the envy of the world. They also helped the U.S. build alliances and, when necessary, win wars."

But, the commentary states, rather than using this soft power to affirm traditional Western values and U.S. interests, the current American foreign policy is "proselytizing for woke ideology. The foreign-policy implications could be catastrophic."

What is woke?

"Wokeness" or "being woke" originated as vernacular for being alert to and actively fighting against perceived racial injustice and social discrimination. Adopted first in American universities, it initially focused on white privilege and slavery compensations

before morphing into a broader ideology as part of a culture war.

Wokeness has since broadened to include many diverse issues, ranging from race to gender identity to sexual morality to immigration. These are all commonly framed through the lens of bias and oppressor-oppressed groups.

People from different parts of the political spectrum use “woke” as a rallying cry against ideas they disagree with, but the term is commonly understood to represent radical social progressive ideology.

Originally a faddish campus philosophy, it has become increasingly intolerant as it’s become the dominant ideology in government institutions, medical associations, the media and even the military.

One consistent feature of social progressivism is that it rejects virtually every tenet of Christianity and replaces religion with a radical moral absolutism that categorizes all people as either victims or oppressors.

In *The Atlantic*, Brookings Institution fellow Shadi Hamid comments, “No wonder the newly ascendant American ideologies, having to fill the vacuum where religion once was, are so divisive. They are *meant* to be divisive” (“America Without God,” April 2021).

“Adherents,” continues Hamid, “take religious notions . . . and repurpose them for secular ends.”

U.S. State Department promoting progressive ideas?

The foreign policy of the U.S. State Department has long championed religious freedom, human rights and equal opportunities. Over time, these foundations of cultural diplomacy have become universal values and assumed great importance.

But today, even as it faces looming challenges, such as international economic competition and the global danger of increasing Chinese and Russian aggression, the current administration is prioritizing the export of “critical” theories to foreign audiences at the expense of those fundamental and enduring principles.

It seems foreign policy is becoming an extension of domestic politics. The U.S. State Department is putting a rigid and divisive social agenda at the forefront of its overseas diplomatic outreach, to the confusion, consternation and even derision of U.S. allies and enemies.

“LGBTQ+ rights are,” according to National Security Council spokesman John Kirby, “a core part of our foreign policy.” The extreme nature of this agenda became clear with a \$2.6 billion request for the 2023 budget that, according to a USAID press release, would fund “foreign assistance programs that promote gender equity and equality worldwide.” (This is despite America’s record high national debt.)

A newly created post of Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice was given the task of advancing the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons. It was given broad authority to direct State Department work on foreign assistance, foreign policy strategy, budgets and public messaging.

Cultural colonialism

New U.S. foreign policy initiatives now advocate sex and gender doctrines that are still highly controversial at home.

Here are just a few of the contentious initiatives that have been taken abroad:

- U.S. embassies hosted or participated in numerous celebrations for the post-modern dogma of gender fluidity with special events for the monthlong “pride” festivities. The State Department website highlighted how it “celebrated Coming Out Day, Spirit Day, International Pronouns Day, Intersex Awareness Day, Intersex Day of Solidarity, and Ace week (celebrating those with asexual-spectrum identities), with many of these commemorative days highlighted for the first time in the Department’s history.” The virtue signaling continued with Secretary of State Antony Blinken tweeting about the “International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia and Transphobia.”
- Pride rainbow banners and Black Lives Matter flags have been authorized to fly alongside the American flag at U.S. embassies.
- U.S. citizens can now be issued passports that allow identification to whichever gender they prefer, including an X gender marker for nonbinary, intersex and gender nonconforming persons.
- In an effort to “promote diversity and inclusion,” the State Department has provided cultural grants to “support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security.” These grants have

funded everything from drag theater performances in Ecuador to a film festival in Portugal that featured films about drag culture, incest and sex between adults and minors. Lebanon, a nation hovering just above economic disaster, received a grant for a “gender and sexuality library,” and Hyderabad and Chennai, India, received funds for workshops on the rights of the LGBTQI+ community.

A global backlash

The majority of countries outside the Western sphere adhere to more traditional values. They do not want the U.S. State Department lecturing them about modern values. This hostile cultural colonialism, as some consider it, is increasingly leading to contention. African nations and Islamic countries in the Middle East are rejecting socially progressive ideas on marriage, family and gender. Majority-Catholic countries object to abortion. European nations find the push on migration, identity and post-colonialism divisive.

According to author and foreign policy expert Walter Russell Mead, “Many values dear to the hearts of Western cultural leaders (LGBTQ rights, abortion on demand, freedom of speech understood as allowing unchecked Internet pornography) puzzle and offend billions of people around the world who haven’t kept up with the latest hot trends on American campuses . . . Moreover, the liberal West’s new, post-Judeo-Christian values agenda divides the West. Culture wars at home don’t promote unity overseas.”

Changing perception of America

In a *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece titled “Woke Imperialism Harms U.S. Interests,” noted geopolitical expert Jakub Grygiel explains that the U.S. is “pushing an

avant-garde concept of ‘rights’ that is isolating America.

“Instead of being admired and emulated,” Grygiel predicts, “the U.S. is becoming for other countries, including some allies, a power to be at best ignored and at worst avoided . . . As a result, the U.S. becomes less appealing to many of our friends and less fearsome to our enemies.”

The war against progressive ideas

An increasing emphasis on *le wokisme*—the French adaptation of the American term *woke*—took hold in France starting in 2021. Now resistance to progressive American hysteria is spreading through French higher

education and society. French politicians, high-profile intellectuals and journalists are warning that progressive ideas from identity-obsessed Americans—specifically on race, gender and post-colonialism—are undermining their society.

Le wokisme is said to be fueling secessionism, gnawing at national unity, encouraging Islamism and wounding France’s proud intellectual and cultural heritage.

Former French
Education Minister

Jean-Michel Blanquer, speaking to France’s *Le Monde* newspaper, said wokeism is an ideology that “fragments and divides, and has conquered certain political, media and academic circles.”

French President Emmanuel Macron went even further, stating that “certain social science theories entirely imported from the United States,” are “racializing” France, creating divisions between minorities, and are “an existential threat” to his nation.

Nations that were once behind the Iron Curtain—Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic—are calculating their best national interests and view wokeness as a risk to European security and social cohesion. The backlash to American-exported woke



ideas is swaying elections, with a handful of nationalist and populist parties across Europe making major advances. Common themes, which are successfully being used in election after election, rail against mass immigration, cultural Marxism and the hollowing out of traditional family values.

In Germany, the right-wing AfD has achieved an unprecedented surge. Far-right parties, championing anti-woke agendas, are propping up coalitions in Finland, Sweden and Slovakia. Voters in Spain and Italy have in recent elections shown increasing animosity toward the new woke ideals of climate science, immigration and pro-LGTBQ+ laws.

Italy's first female prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, in office since October 2022, has loudly criticized gender extremism, praised traditional family values and said "no to the LGBT lobby."

The fight against woke theories has European heads of state looking for a leader. As Yaroslav Trofimov, chief foreign-affairs correspondent at *The Wall Street Journal*, notes: "If you looked at statements from far-right leaders across Europe, they always said that we need a strong leader like Putin who defends our values, our civilization against the decadence of the West."

Russia and China attack the West's promotion of progressive ideas

"The moral and political confusion of the contemporary West," states Walter Russell Mead, "is the secret weapon that the leaders of Russia and China believe will bring the American world order to its knees."

Even as America sends billions of dollars in armaments to Ukraine, the promotion of pride events in Kiev puts the U.S. at odds with the culture of an overwhelmingly Orthodox Christian country. This gives Russia the opportunity to present itself as the protector of family, tradition and religion.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is attempting to weaken Western resolve and undermine Western unity by proclaiming Russia to be the bastion of traditional values.

A successor ideology

The Bible clearly defines a godly standard of conduct applicable to mankind since the dawn of creation. The law given to Israel provided specific instructions on

subjects ranging from sex to the proper respect and treatment of foreigners. Sin is defined as breaking these immutable laws (1 John 3:4).

The life that Christians are called to transcends getting swept up in societal pressures and trends. We are to follow the Creator God, who states, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

Unfortunately, the astounding number of Americans and Europeans who now treat God's Word with utter contempt has climbed so high that it brings to mind the observation of G.K. Chesterton. He said, "When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything."

The "anything" that has spread throughout the West today includes extremist views that twist history, justice and sex to promote sin, confusion and endless discontent.

The secular theories and societal debates that have been thundering through the British and American public spheres—centered around race, abortion, transgender rights and the legacy of colonialism—are likely to further separate Europe from America.

Biblical prophecy describes a confederation of 10 core nations in a future European superstate (Revelation 17:12; see "[Is the EU a Superpower?](#)"). These nations today are under an increasing threat of fragmentation and are only loosely held together by kinship, culture and traditions (Matthew 24:7-9).

In response to greater social pressures and external threats, this geopolitical behemoth will soon reawaken to astound the entire world (Revelation 13:1-7). Despite the awe-inspiring power of this political and military colossus, it is described as a mixture of iron and clay—partly strong and partly weak (Daniel 2:31-45; 11:40). This may describe the combustible mix of divisive ideologies that are present in a more tradition-oriented Eastern bloc and a liberal or progressive Western group.

Despite these troubling trends, the future is guaranteed to bring another completely different—and lasting—belief system with the much-anticipated return of Jesus Christ. To be sure that you understand what will happen prior to His second coming, read our free booklet *The Book of Revelation: The Storm Before the Calm*.

—Neal Hogberg

How to Correct Others Without Burning Your Bridges

Sometimes we feel an urgent need to tell people what they did wrong. Sometimes we shy away from sharing helpful correction. What should a Christian do?

"S*top being a knucklehead!"*
"How could you be so stupid?"
Or on a social media status: *"In case anyone was wondering, if you borrow something and return it broken, you really should own up to it."*

Such flawed attempts to correct another's behavior, mistake or offense often generate more strife and conflict.

Christians and correction

This "Christianity in Progress" column focuses on applying Christian principles to real living. As such, we touch on the realities of living in a broken world and interacting with other flawed individuals.

Christians—like the entire human family—deal with mistakes, offenses and numerous blunders that crop up in relationships and everyday life.

- A coworker loses control and curses at a colleague.
- An acquaintance slanders you on social media.
- A schoolmate bullies your child.
- Your spouse fails to keep a commitment.
- A friend borrows a tool and returns it broken.

And that's just on Monday.

Some situations inflame emotions and, without careful handling, can have lasting consequences. These moments sometimes require correction.

Correction isn't always bad

Correction isn't always a bad thing. Correction often helps us learn or improve skills, language, hobbies and techniques.

And we're reminded that God inspired the Bible for us, in part, "for reproof, for correction, [and] for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Accepting correction and taking responsibility for one's mistakes, offenses and sins is a necessary part of a Christian's walk. See "[How to Confess Your Sins to One Another](#)" for an insightful review.

But what about correcting others? Are Christians free to lash out when harmed or on the receiving end of an offense?

Jesus' example

Jesus did not shy away from giving correction. He offered direct, loving correction throughout His ministry. Jesus lived the moral standards preserved in Scripture. When observing others operating outside that moral standard, Jesus sometimes provided correction.

Jesus' approach varied depending on the situation and the person involved.

When Peter resisted Jesus' mission—even going so far as to rebuke his Master—Jesus offered stern correction:



“Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:23).

Although Peter spoke out of love and concern for Jesus, he didn’t understand the need for His suffering and death. So Jesus responded with a direct, assertive correction. (And, of course, it is not a style that mere humans should attempt to copy exactly.)

However, when Martha asked Jesus to order her sister Mary to help serve, Jesus’ correction was tender: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things” (Luke 10:41). In correcting Martha, Jesus demonstrated sincere, compelling gentleness.

In addition to His example, Jesus also gave instructions about our approach to judging and correcting others. (Learn more in our online resources “[What Did Jesus Mean by ‘Judge Not’?](#)” “[Can You See Your Spiritual Blind Spots?](#)” and “[Conflict Resolution: Should I Say Something?](#)”)

As followers of Jesus, how can we correct others without burning our bridges? While one article cannot cover every factor, here are four important considerations.

1. Clarify your attitude (be motivated by love)

The overriding principle governing Christian behavior toward others is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). Often referred to as the [Golden Rule](#), this ethic is valuable and unchanging. Paul emphasized, “Let *all* that you do be done *with love*” (1 Corinthians 16:14, emphasis added throughout).

This principle applies to giving correction. When God corrects, He roots it in love (Hebrews 12:6). Likewise, love must be at the center of any correction we offer.

Correcting others can be emotionally charged—making room for pride, vanity, self-promotion, bitterness and anger to overwhelm good intentions—so

we should approach correction carefully. Social media affords *freedom* to correct at a perceived distance, which often amplifies the worst attitudes.

When considering the need to correct someone, we should begin by clarifying our own attitude. We should take a moment—or even several days if possible—to prayerfully ascertain our motives. We need to be alert to any hint of vengeance or pride. Evaluating our own motivations or biases can help us avoid missteps. In some cases, we may need to fast and seek wise counsel to ensure we approach correction lovingly.

Paul instructed Timothy about the ministerial role: “A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be *gentle* to all, able to teach, *patient, in humility* correcting those who are in opposition” (2 Timothy 2:24-25).

In this case, Paul was referring to correcting someone who had strayed from the faith. However, the cautionary advice to be gentle, patient and humble applies anytime correction is involved.

2. Practice discernment

Not every observed wrong or ill requires our correction. Christians should “seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14). We can *choose* to overlook many mistakes, blunders and offenses. Unnecessarily inserting ourselves into another’s quarrel is “like one who takes a dog by the ears” (Proverbs 26:17). Discerning when to correct and when to step aside is important.

Likewise, not every person is open to correction. Proverbs advises: “Don’t bother correcting mockers; they will only hate you. But correct the wise, and they will love you” (Proverbs 9:8, New Living Translation).

Christians must use wisdom to discern whom to approach. We don’t have to correct every social media user.

We should evaluate whether we have authority to correct. While Jesus had broad authority, we

will witness wrongs that are outside our authority as Christians. Not even Jesus Himself corrected everything He witnessed.

Many ills—widespread corruption, crime, injustice, etc.—are outside our authority to correct. We must discern when we don't have the authority to intervene and must focus on praying for the Kingdom of God to come.

Jesus' discernment enabled Him to tailor correction individually. His sternness with Peter was what Peter needed. Similarly, His approach toward Martha was what she needed. Emulate this tailored approach. Paul coached Timothy to approach individuals thoughtfully and respectfully, tailoring correction to preserve their dignity whenever possible (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

It is important to note that it may not be appropriate or safe to address some situations directly or personally. Legal issues involving cases of abuse, neglect, trauma or violence may necessitate avoiding a direct confrontation. Law enforcement and professional counseling may be the appropriate remedy.

3. Check the facts—again!

Jesus had the ability to accurately and completely discern situations and the hearts of others. His correction was perfect. While that is a goal for Christians, we don't have perfect discernment and insight into the hearts of others. We are limited in our ability to accurately perceive every situation. This is especially true in the foggy world of social media.

When approaching someone to offer correction, be willing to gain clarity on facts. Ask questions. And then patiently and actively listen. We must be willing to wisely and humbly accept when we've made a misjudgment.

Proverbs 18:17 cautions, "The one who first states a case seems right, until the other comes and cross-examines" (New Revised Standard Version). This is true even in the case of our own judgment. The story we tell ourselves—based on our own interpretation of events—may well seem right yet be proven wrong. Humility and patience will help us be better situated to receive feedback and adjust where necessary.

4. Begin with the end in mind

The last consideration regarding correction is to keep the end goal in mind. The intent of correction should

not be to humiliate or embarrass. Instead, the primary goal is to facilitate change, forgiveness and, as much as possible, reconciliation.

Jesus obviously forgave Peter. After all, He later tasked Peter with feeding and caring for members of His Church (John 21:15-18). Jesus corrected Peter to bring him into harmony with God's will.

When offering correction, keep this broad goal in mind. Christians should strive "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This takes substantial effort when addressing contention or offenses.

Before correcting someone, prepare yourself to forgive and offer reconciliation.

The [parable of the prodigal son](#) effectively illustrates this (Luke 15:11-32). After the prodigal son reconciled with the father, the older son held on to pride, grief and anger. An unwillingness to forgive can lead to bitterness and a host of negative consequences. Be prepared to forgive and reconcile.

For especially tense or sensitive matters, several resources are available. Books such as *Boundaries* and *Crucial Confrontations* offer strategies for organizing our thoughts and emotions effectively.

Correction is generally done privately—out of love—not for spectacle. Jesus instructs, "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault *between you and him alone*" (Matthew 18:15). The rest of that verse reinforces the principles of gentleness, patience and humility: "If he hears you, you have gained your brother."

The desired intent is reconciliation.

Don't burn your bridges

Correcting others is a delicate yet important part of a Christian life.

In some situations, even if we are gentle, patient and humble, the other party may not respond well. The other person may storm off, overreact or even pause the relationship. This can be emotionally draining. Continue to pray for wisdom and discernment on how best to proceed.

As Christians in progress, consider these four points when correcting others. You might just gain a brother instead of burning a bridge.

—Jason Hyde

Wonders of GOD'S Creation

We Accept Large Bills

The first thing most people notice about the hornbill is . . . well, the bill.

It's not small—and in many cases, it includes a rather unmistakable horn, called a casque. To support the weight of the casque, two of the hornbill's neck vertebrae are fused together.

But what's *really* interesting about hornbills is how they raise a family. While incubating her eggs, a female hornbill molts, losing her flight feathers all at once.

A bird with no feathers is a bird that can't fly—and a bird that can't fly is easy prey.

But before she lays her eggs and molts, the female hornbill and her mate find a suitable tree hole for her nest and cement her inside, sealing the entryway with mud, droppings and fruit pulp. She leaves a tiny slit in the entry—just large enough for the male to stick his funny-looking beak through.

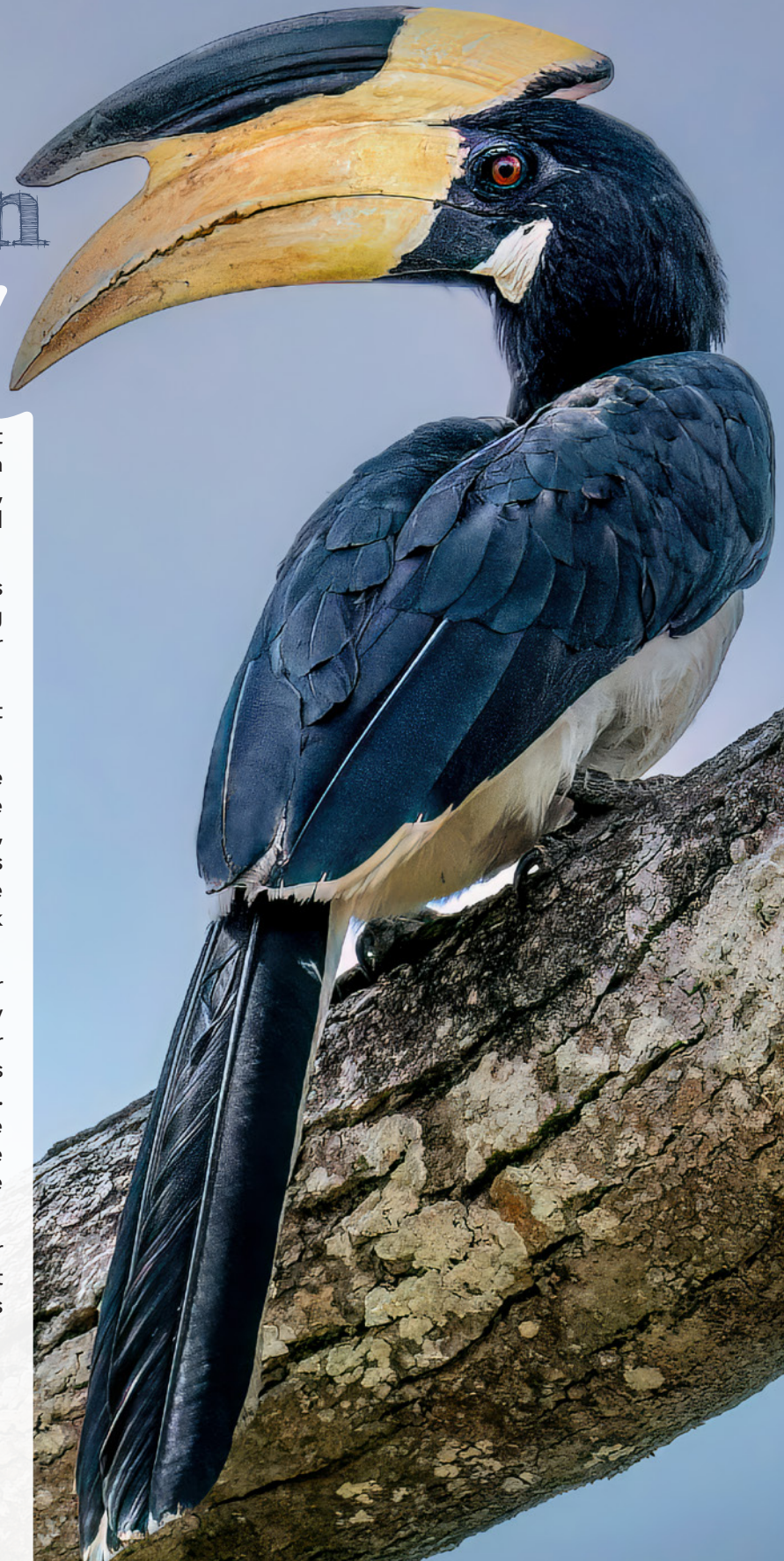
For the next three months, while the mother regrows her feathers and while the baby chicks hatch and grow, the faithful father makes multiple trips daily, delivering fruits and insects to feed his family through the slit. When the growing chicks crowd the nest, the newly feathered mom breaks out, reseals the opening and joins the father in feeding the chicks inside.

And because hornbills generally mate for life, the mother and father pair will repeat this process over and over again for years to come.

Pictured: Malabar pied hornbill
(*Anthracoceros coronatus*)

Photo by James Capo

Text by Jeremy Lallier and James Capo





Did Jesus Keep the Sabbath Day?

Some say Jesus didn't affirm the Sabbath command. Is that true? Did Jesus observe the Sabbath? If so, is His example relevant to Christians today?

In this series, we've explored the various happenings of Jesus' early ministry. We've specifically covered His two primary practices—teaching and healing.

It's interesting to note that Jesus often did both on a particular day of the week, the Sabbath day. That is the seventh day of the week, the day God declared holy at creation and later enshrined as [the fourth](#) of His 10 Commandments (Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11).

Should we brush that off as a coincidence?

Some people reason that Jesus recognized the Sabbath day only because He was Jewish, which bound Him to the Old Testament laws. But was He a Sabbath-keeper only because of His ethnicity?

Or do Jesus' practices on the Sabbath have powerful implications for those of us striving to walk as He walked?

Jesus, the synagogue and the Sabbath

Luke's Gospel provides an early reference to Jesus' Sabbath day activities: "So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He

went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read" (Luke 4:16).

The synagogues were centers for learning and worship for Jews who lived outside Jerusalem and couldn't worship at the temple. Gentiles who feared God and observed the Sabbath could also congregate at the synagogues to hear the Scriptures read and taught.

This passage shows us two significant points about Jesus and the Sabbath:

1. Observing the Sabbath was "His custom."

The Greek word for "custom" can also be translated *habit*. Congregating on the Sabbath, either at the temple or at a synagogue, was Jesus' habit. That is, it was His consistent practice—*His custom*. Sabbath-keeping wasn't something He did only if it was convenient.

In Leviticus 23, God's weekly and annual Sabbaths are called "holy convocations" (Leviticus 23:2-3). Jesus, in His faithfulness and fidelity to God's law, both rested and assembled at formal services every Sabbath day.



He did not do it out of begrudging necessity. It was His way of life.

2. Jesus was an active participant in the Sabbath service.

We read that He “stood up to read.” Each synagogue had an attendant responsible for leading and organizing the service. That Jesus was asked to stand and read implies that the attendant was familiar with Him. Jesus not only grew up in Nazareth, but also probably attended this synagogue consistently throughout His childhood, teen and young adult years.

After reading from a portion of Isaiah, Jesus revealed that He was fulfilling the very scriptures He read (Luke 4:18-19, 21). It was a claim that led others to try to kill Him (verses 28-29)—a very inappropriate activity for the Sabbath, to say the least.

However, this incident did not deter Him from consistently keeping the Sabbath. After this event, He left Nazareth and “went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths” (verse 31; see also Luke 13:10).

Jesus in the grainfields on the Sabbath

On another Sabbath day, the Pharisees accused Jesus of leading a group of Sabbath-breakers. However, a closer look at what was happening reveals how baseless that accusation was.

Mark records that Jesus and the disciples “went through the grainfields on the Sabbath” (Mark 2:23). They weren’t walking through this field to do farmwork; they were merely passing through, perhaps en route to a Sabbath synagogue service.

As they walked through the field, the disciples “began to pluck the heads of grain.” (This wasn’t stealing. God’s law permitted people to do this; see Deuteronomy 23:25.)

They weren’t harvesting grain, but just plucking off a tiny bit for a light snack as they passed through.

Imagine walking through an apple orchard and picking a low-hanging apple to snack on. Picking an apple off a tree, like plucking a head of grain, takes almost no effort and is by no means equivalent to harvesting the crop.

But a group of Pharisees nearby pounced on this: “Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” (verse 24). They accused the disciples of Sabbath-breaking based on a very broad application of the Old Testament command to refrain from work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10; 31:15; 35:2).

Jesus saw right through the pettiness and silliness of this accusation. The disciples were by no means doing labor. They were having a light snack, not harvesting a grainfield.

Pharisaic Judaism, in keeping with the developing Talmudic approach to the law, had radically broadened and expanded the God-given laws of the Old Testament to be much more detailed and limiting than God ever intended. The Pharisees had expanded simple concepts like *labor* to include normal activities that few would consider labor.

Eventually, the Jewish law code known as the Mishnah would define [39 forbidden forms of work](#)—many even pickier than interpreting what the disciples did here as harvesting a field.

Jesus would deal with this issue repeatedly during

His ministry. He would continually point out how adding so many restrictions on top of God's revealed law did more harm than good. At best, some of the laws of tradition obstructed God's original intent by putting extreme emphasis on small, tangential details. At worst, some of these laws outright contradicted God's original intent (Matthew 15:3).

Jesus' powerful endorsement of the Sabbath day

Now back to the incident in the grainfield. Jesus answered the Sabbath-breaking accusation by making one of the most significant statements about the Sabbath that is found in the Bible. Every person who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior should deeply consider the implications of these words.

He said: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28).

Not only does this statement reveal God's intent for the Sabbath, but it also powerfully connects Jesus Christ to the Sabbath day.

Let's take a closer look.

Jesus said the Sabbath was made "for man." In other words, it was designed to benefit human beings. It was a gift. Through the Sabbath, God gifted mankind a weekly 24-hour period of physical, mental and spiritual rest. This harkens back to God's words to Isaiah, declaring His intention for people to "call the Sabbath a *delight*" (Isaiah 58:13, emphasis added).

God always intended for the Sabbath to be a delightful blessing, not a mere obligation.

Jesus said human beings weren't made "for the Sabbath." In other words, the Sabbath wasn't created as an onerous burden to unnaturally force into our lives to placate God. It is a law, but like all of God's other laws, it was designed for our benefit. Sometimes, we don't fully understand those benefits until we start keeping it.

Just as God's law forbidding adultery was designed to imbue a marriage with the blessing of stability and trust, the Sabbath law was designed to bless human beings with a weekly day of physical and spiritual rest and rejuvenation.

Jesus declared Himself "Lord of the Sabbath." In other words, Jesus unequivocally connected the

Sabbath to Himself. The preexistent Christ—the One the Father used to create all things—created the Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3; Colossians 1:16). He was also the One who gave the Sabbath law to Israel in Exodus 20 and even punished Israel for transgressing it.

By saying He was "Lord of the Sabbath," Jesus was saying He had the ultimate authority to determine how it should be observed. The Pharisees were completely out of line in lecturing the Lord and Creator of the Sabbath about how the Sabbath should be kept!

Many in the Christian world write off the Sabbath as an old Jewish law that has no application for modern Christians. However, this view directly contradicts Jesus' words in Mark 2:27-28. By declaring Himself "Lord of the Sabbath," Jesus linked the Sabbath to Himself and established His ownership and authority over it.

The Sabbath day is unequivocally *Christian* because it was created, observed and validated by Christ Himself.

Jesus affirmed the Sabbath

In addition to declaring Himself "Lord of the Sabbath," Jesus also made several statements affirming the authority and continuation of the law that includes the Sabbath—the 10 Commandments.

Jesus declared that the 10 Commandments were not only necessary for eternal life, but also the definition of what it means to truly love God and other people (Matthew 19:17; John 14:15, 21; 15:10).

He said that not "one jot or one tittle" would be abolished from God's law and that those who do and teach these commandments will be "great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:18-19). A jot referred to the smallest letter, and a tittle was a tiny part of a letter.

The Fourth Commandment to keep the Sabbath holy is much bigger than a jot or tittle.

There are many different ways we can show the continuing validity of the Sabbath, but in the context of this series, a powerful proof is Jesus' personal example. Jesus faithfully kept the Sabbath every seventh day—it was *His custom*.

By resting and assembling on God's seventh-day Sabbath, Christians today continue to . . .

Walk as He walked.

—Erik Jones

A Safe Crossing

An amazing crossing of the Atlantic Ocean underscored a deep biblical analogy in my mind.

I'm writing this column from the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. I've crossed the Atlantic many times by airplane in my work; I would estimate about 225 times. This time is a first, however, because we're not flying. We're crossing "the pond" on the world's last ocean liner, the *Queen Mary 2*.

I have wanted for years to see the middle of the ocean from sea level and experience the vastness of the deep. I hoped for some heavy seas, not life-threatening, but rough enough to experience the magnitude of the waves.

Not a cruise, a crossing

This is not a *cruise*, we have been informed. There are no stops, no port visits along the way. This is a *crossing*, which used to be the only way to travel between Europe and North America.

When I informed my parents of our plans, my mother told me this would be my *second* trip on a Queen Mary. She was pregnant with me when they crossed from the U.K. back to the U.S. on the original *Queen Mary*.

Our current voyage has been much more comfortable than theirs. The QM2 has underwater stabilizers that greatly reduce pitch and roll. We already hope to make another crossing in the future with family and friends.

We've seen dolphins and sea birds in the middle of the ocean. We had our brush with rough seas, 20-foot swells in gale-force winds, but only for 36 hours. We watched massive waves wash over portholes on lower decks. We stood on the upper deck of the giant ship and turned 360 degrees to see nothing but water.

It is magnificent.

The great waters of life

The writer of Psalm 107 was acquainted with the Mediterranean; he used the crossing of great waters as a metaphor for God's providence in the voyage of life.

"Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters, they see the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep.



"For He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the sea. They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths; their soul melts because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end.

"Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, so that its waves are still" (Psalm 107:23-29).

There are calm and rough seas in life. God is ready to deliver those who call on Him in times of turbulence and to guide them to a safe port.

Meditating on this, I plan to be more observant, whether in quiescent waters or in tempest. I will strive to see beyond immediate threats or joys and focus on the works of the Lord, His wonders in the deep, as He guides me to His safe haven.

Joel Meeker

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joel C. Meeker".

Life Hope & Truth

P R E S E N T S

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