

# Our Times

A FAMILY MAGAZINE FOR BETTER LIVING

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THE ALL-SUFFICIENT BIBLE



## Tread Softly

## Into the New Year

by June Strong

**Here are some questions to ponder as the new year begins—plus a suggestion or two.**

Whatever we may think of the old man with the scythe and the New Year baby, this is the season to take inventory of our lifestyles. I have thus prepared some questions to stimulate our thinking. So write down your answers and ponder them as we press through the gates of 1991.

**1. Do you operate under a pall of pressure and tensions?** If you had one day a month in which to do just as you please, how would you use it?

**2. Do you observe one day each week** in which you set

aside all secular duties and spend the 24-hour period in a growing relationship with God and God's people? (Be sure to read the promise to faithful Sabbath keepers found in Isaiah 58:13,14.)

**3. Are you ever alone?** Do you feel frightened of solitude, or do you welcome it? If you are uneasy or restless when alone, try to decide why. Do you turn on a radio or TV to avoid silence? If so, try starting with 10 or 15 minutes of absolute quiet. Increase the period a few moments each day until you come to anticipate stillness. Try using these moments to memorize a scripture text—you'll be delighted to find those very scriptures will

bring peace on sleepless nights.

**4. Do you have at least three friends** who will listen to your problems and share theirs? If not, have you failed to take the time to cultivate friendships? Have you made a new friend during the past year? Have you made any contributions to the friendship, such as luncheon invitations, periodic phone calls, visits?

**5. Did you achieve any specific goal during the past year?** If so, what? List your goals for 1991. Are they realistic? (Better to have two that are attainable than six pipe dreams.) Are you attempting to reach these goals with, without, prayer? Do

you feel comfortable sharing them with God? Do some of these goals benefit others? Have you done anything in the past week for an elderly, ill, or lonely person? (Read Isaiah 58:6-11)

**6. Do you walk, bicycle, or jog each day?** Do you consider personal health a part of your Christian experience? How well can you work for God with a headache or a chronic illness?

**7. What do you think of God?** What five adjectives would you use to describe Him? Can you willingly bend the knee to such a God? How would you rate your relationship with Him on a scale of one to ten? Does Bible study have a place in your schedule? Do you feel its power working in your life,

or is your study a dutiful ritual? If so, why?

I fear that in developing this inventory for you I have rippled the backwaters of my own life. My own answers disturb me—my consistent inability to organize my days and achieve my goals, my lack of time spent in ministry to those lonely and hurting. (I tremble even to delve into the motivation aspect.)

I have dozen little plans for improving my marriage, but I had them a year ago—and two years ago.

Several times a year I have a go at daily walking and biking, only to succumb to inertia and busyness.

But I do keep in touch with nature, if only for the breakfast encounters. And I do set aside a 24-hour period

each week—the Sabbath—for time with God and His followers. It's a time for renewal. Without it I could not wrestle with the other six days.

I rate my relationship with God at a solid 10. Not because I'm so faithful, but because when I become tangled in the trivia of this world, He gently picks at the knots and woos me back to Him. Praise God for such a Lord.

Your struggles may be totally different from mine, but I would guess they are just as hopeless in one area or another. Perhaps as others surge onto the pathway of a new year, you and I should just kneel at the entrance and admit our helplessness to the One who tenderly waits to lead the way.

## Mice in the Piano

Imagine a family of mice who lived all their lives in a large piano. To them in their piano world came the music of the instrument, filling all the dark spaces with sound and harmony. At first the mice were impressed by it. They drew comfort and wonder from the thought that there was Someone who made the music—though invisible to them—above, yet close to them. They loved to think of the Great Player whom they could not see.

Then one day a daring mouse climbed up part of the piano and returned very thoughtful. He had found out how the music was made. Wires were the secret;

tightly stretched wires of graduated lengths which trembled and vibrated. They must revise all their old beliefs: none but the most conservative could any longer believe in the Unseen Player.

Later another explorer carried the explanation further. Hammers were now the secret, numbers of hammers dancing and leaping on the wires. This was a more complicated theory, but it all went to show that they lived in a purely mechanical and mathematical world. The Unseen Player came to be thought of as a myth.

But the pianist continued to play.



# I HAVE AIDS!

## I NEED SOME ANSWERS

by J Douglas Simons

In 1984 I was serving on the pastoral care staff at the Shady Grove Adventist Hospital in Rockville, Maryland. Five years ago little was known concerning the growing epidemic of AIDS. Vivid accounts of how patients were being mistreated in some area hospitals were portrayed in the local news. While I was there, a person with AIDS was admitted to our critical care unit, and the following insightful incident took place.

The first question the patient asked one of the nurses was "Are you afraid of me?" She replied, "No, I'm not. I'm here to take care of you." What he really wanted to know was "Are you concerned about me; will you care for me? AIDS patients recognize the need for precautions when care is administered (i.e., persons entering their room wear a gown, gloves, and a mask for protection). **What they represent is being treated insensitively.** No matter what a person's physical condition is, each of God's creatures is due compassionate care.

Since that initial experience, many questions have been asked by patients to me and other health care professionals. Interestingly, similar questions surface again and again. Questions relating to medical procedures, personal and family problems, and psychological and spiritual concerns. I believe readers can profit from hearing these questions and their answers. Time and space will permit sharing only some of the more urgent questions/answers that persons in health care hear most often. The questions are not necessarily listed in order of their importance.

### Am I Going To Die?

When a person first hears that he has tested positive as having the AIDS virus, it is both shocking and devastating. Often the person hears only a death note ringing in his ears. Tender regard of the patient's feelings along with loving support is needed now. As part of this support, Pam Russo, nurse manager of an

adult outpatient clinic feels that "it is important not to deny that they may die in the future, but to try and help them understand where they are now and what they can do to help themselves." Understanding starts with knowing the purpose of the test. Testing positive does not always mean that a person has AIDS. It means that the person is infected with the virus, which could develop into AIDS. Once infected, a person remains that way and can transmit the virus to others. According to evidence, not all infected persons go on to develop full-blown AIDS. And for some reason, not all of these persons die.

Encouragement is given to accept the precious gift of life each day, to alter lifestyles if need be, to be more informed, to change dietary habits, to exercise, and to seek treatment.

### What's the Use of Going Through All This Anyway?

"All this" is the multitesting procedure, lab

specimens (urine/blood), medicines, and other progressive treatments. An utter feeling of helplessness at having to depend on others so much leads to depression and despair.

Freda Martin, director of social work discharge planning, puts it this way: "I think the thing that confronts an AIDS patient is the hopelessness that they feel. They are going through this, and there is really no positive end to what they are going through now."

These feelings of dependency and hopelessness, which help deplete life's meaning and control, are further complicated by eventually having to cut back or cut out a job routine. In his effort to hold on to something dear, one patient said, "I lost my job, I lost my care, I lost my house—I won't let go of my cat, even if my prognosis doesn't improve!"

In order to improve this bleak outlook surrounding "why go through all this anyway?" a caring support person must reinforce self-worth. The patient is led to discover meaningful, creative outlets—to become involved in church activities, to be part of a community volunteer group, to participate in support groups, or to pursue a hobby. Don't just sit; do something.

### How Do I Tell My Family?

This question is often

forced by a strong sense of anticipated rejection. No one wants to run the risk of hurting or being rejected by those closest to you.

I remember one such patient who faced the dilemma of having to tell his family. After talking for a while, he shared that he had lived the gay life. His family was accepting of him. He was not ostracized. I encouraged him not to rush and tell them immediately. I counselled that he give himself time to sort through his own feelings. Then when he felt comfortable enough to share with his family, do it. I said he should optimistically trust the strength of the relationship he always had with his family. It would not mean that there would not be appropriate reactions or hurt, but ultimately they would be there for him. At any rate, he should refuse to be devastated regardless of their response.

Even when there are strained relationships in families, there is often reconciliation in the midst of a patient crisis. Often where children of patients are involved, depending on their age, they prove again and again that they understand more than adults give them credit for, and their support is invaluable. One 9-year-old son recently gave loving care to his father until he died.

This same question also impacts on whether to tell other friends or associates. Whether the patient does or

does not depends largely upon the significance of those relationships and his need for additional support. There is no absolute ultimatum to "have to" tell them.

### What Have I Done?

Often, with intense anger, a patient will blurt out, "What have I done to deserve all this?" There are two key issues presented: one is a strong sense of guilt; the other, a feeling of punishment or condemnation. The two are separate but interrelated.

It is not that a patient does not know what he has done to cause his sickness. It is often the feeling of abandonment, of not knowing how to deal with the guilt and feeling that he is cast out by God and others. The best remedy I offer is to help the patient see what he has just done with me—that is, he has acknowledged it. He should honestly admit the reality of his situation and its cause. David the psalmist said: "for I acknowledge my transgressions" (Psalm 51:3). To admit wrong is the first step in getting help. First John 1:9 reminds us that confession brings forgiveness and peace of mind.

But then why punishment? I share with the patient that God loves him and does not delight in punishment. I tell him that AIDS is not punishment from God. If

so, would God be loving if He punished children or adults who unknowingly become infected with AIDS. No. Instead, AIDS has come as a consequence of results of wrong behaviour, which is against God's will for our happiness. In other words, wrong choices affect the individual and others.

God checks sin, but He loves the sinner. I stress God's love for all of us (see John 8:10,11).

### Can I be Saved?

A person with AIDS and a transsexual (a person who has undergone surgery to modify the sex organs to mimic those of the opposite sex) who felt destined to hell asked me a similar question: "Can I be born again?" I'm so thankful that I could respond without hesitation that if there is anything that the gospel speaks clearly about, it is that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16,17). Furthermore, "If any man (person) be in Christ, he is a new creature (creation): old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

I encouraged the patient that God would take her

where He found her. And that if she was willing, that God would change her life in His own time and way. God may not choose to alter the course of the AIDS disease in a person's life. He or she may die from it, but peaceful acceptance with God can be obtained. And AIDS patients can claim the gift of eternal life through faith.

These are just a few of the touching questions that AIDS patients ask. They deserve honest, direct, compassionate answers. Your belief system may cause you to ans-



A patient with AIDS Dementia Complex: as ADC advances, patients are listless and apparently indifferent to their illness. They become completely dependent on the humane care and support of others.

wer them differently from mine. Regardless of your orientation, I do hope you answer them in a factual, understanding, loving way.

The questions are endless, but I challenge the readers of this article to be compassionate persons who offer God's love to people where they are. I implore that you walk with people through their valleys. I hope you have witnessed God's power to change lives and that you will successfully communicate this reality.

# The Tenderness of Christ

by Henry Wright



From time immemo-  
rial, love tales have  
dotted the pages of  
history: "boy meets  
girl," "rich man

gives up all for poor,"  
"sighted brother  
gives his eyes so that  
little brother can have  
a turn at seeing." Whatever

kind of love story moves your soul, there is none that can compare with the love of God in Christ—truly the greatest love story ever told. It is a story that takes the word *love*

turns it upside down, and pours out all its deep meaning before our wondering eyes. In the immortal words of the gospel: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

This idea moves us because somewhere in the hope chest of our thoughts we want to be loved (and indeed, we want to learn to love) in this magnificent way. In the biblical love story, God, the lover of our souls, loved us from the start.

Go with me to the Garden of Eden and hear the Lord God searching for the human race. Covered with fig leaves, Adam and Eve hid from Him. What they did not understand was the tremendous excitement and love that possessed the mind of God as He created them. Before He infused their bodies with the breath of life, He had already embellished their garden home with every convenience. And as with undimmed eyes they looked upon their palatial paradise, every detail said "I love you."

But then they broke the heart of Him who loved them, and became the "Gomer" of the universe. What disgrace upon their Lover in the eyes of the unfallen beings throughout the galaxies! But, like Hosea, God pursued them. "I will bind you to me forever," He

says, "with chains of righteousness and justice and love and mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness and love, and you will really know me then as you never have before" (Hosea 2:19,20, TLB).

The overpowering aspect of this story is that God knew ahead of time the grief this creation would bring to Him. Yet He created us and gave us the power of choice. Amazing!

Thus the entire Bible is linked together by the concept that God is always seeking to retrieve us and redeem us. He comes to the garden to give us hope. He comes to the ark to float us over the flood waves of our rebellion. He comes as the pillar of cloud and fire to shade us in the heat of life's trials and to light the way through our wilderness of fear.

Try to grasp, if you can, the utter malignity of sin in contrast to God's impeccable holiness. It then becomes obvious that we are the pariah of the universe. Our very presence is contaminating. Every imaginable evil abounds with us. God might very easily have eliminated us all and started over afresh! But no, this loving Creator of ours accepted our freedom of choice. Nevertheless, He allows the result of sin to take its course, and that for our benefit.

In the fifteenth chapter of Luke, Jesus told three par-

ables of His loving quest for us.

In the story of the lost sheep He depicted a person who is lost, who knows that he is, but who cannot find his way back home. Might that be you? I have always believed that this little animal represents the new Christian or the young person in the church who gets fed up with the fold and decides to try some wilder "grass." To him the fold seems too traditional, too rule-bound, no room for creativity or independence. And in some ways, this assessment may even be correct.

### Link of Love

Love went even further. Jesus left heaven and came to this quarantined planet beset with a malady that makes even the AIDS virus seem mild in comparison—a disease so communicable that it has ravished every person that was ever born, except One. Jesus came and took our flesh.

Ellen G White, reflecting on the same idea, wrote: "Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death that was ours, that we might receive the life which was His (*The Desire of*

*Ages*, page 25). He truly died the sinner's death! And why all this for you, friend? John gives the answer: "For God is love" (1John 4:8).

We see the love of God demonstrated in the case of Matthew the publican. The scribes and the pharisees were there to accuse. They did not understand the tenderness that flowed from the bosom of Christ. Their words were meant to belittle Him. "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them," they charged (Luke 15:2, NIV).

What wonderful news! *He is guilty*, indeed!—guilty of welcoming sinners!

To a race unable to go beyond the borders of their own solar system because of the plague they carry, Jesus, the ruler of the whole cosmos, says, "Welcome, sinner! I'll eat with you! I'll walk with you! I'll talk with you! I'll be with you!"

### The Story Unfolds

But such sheep forget that the fold actually belongs to Jesus. This implies that when one leaves the fold, one does not merely leave the church; one also leaves Jesus.

But what does the shepherd do when this occurs? He leaves the fold and searches, exposing Himself to the same hazards the wandering sheep experiences, until He finds the headstrong one.

The beauty of the story un-

folds as the shepherd gathers the sheep into his arms and restores its status as a part of the fold. What a parable of the immeasurable seeking love of God!

The story of the lost coin is no less significant in our understanding of God's tender love. The lost coin represents the person who is lost, who does not know that he is, and who thus makes no attempt to be found. Represented by an inanimate object, this kind of person has lost the desire for spiritual things. The coin is covered with the dust *in the house*, lost at home! But it is valued by its owner. The woman sweeps for it.

What a tender picture of Christ! He is seen here as a woman, a concerned woman, who cherishes what she seeks. May we, through this powerful story, see the Lord searching for us with the light of His word. Let us sense His hand reaching for us, ignoring the dust of indifference and sinfulness that covers us. Perhaps as hard and cold as an inanimate coin, may we be warmed by His touch of love.

Finally, Christ tells the story of the prodigal son. This son exemplifies the person reared in the church system. He has learned the Bible verses in Sabbath School. He has attended church school academy, and college. He has worked in the furniture factory or the business office.

But he comes to the place where he turns his back on it all. Ignoring his father's care and sacrifice, so to speak, he demands: "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me."

Quite frankly, everything that happens after this is inevitable. When I take the gift of life out of my Father's control, there is tragic waste. In the story there is no seeking shepherd, no sweeping woman. The son is treated differently because his level of exposure to God's Word and church is much deeper. This person is a willful sinner.

This person knows the Bible. He knows the Spirit of Prophecy. Maybe he even knows Greek and Hebrew. He knows key people in the church. Yes, he even knows that some of them have skeletons in their closets. No pastor or parent can straighten him out, because *he knows*. The prodigal does not look up until he has spent all. He winds up with pigs, who teach him a profound lesson in life: They stayed where they belonged.

We who know about the Sabbath do not belong on our jobs on that day. We who know that our bodies are the temples of God should not have cigarettes in our purses or beer in our refrigerators. We belong at home. And our loving Father longs for us to come to ourselves. This great love story could be our story.



The "Divine Library" of 66 books, was written by some 40 authors over a period of 1,600 years. What's its relevance—its message and value—for us today?

#### A. It's the inspired and infallible Word of the Living God.

"All Scripture is God-breathed." 2Timothy 3:16, NIV (See also 2Peter 1:21, NIV; and Ezekiel 3:4, RSV.)

#### B. It alone reveals the only way of salvation.

"The holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." 2Timothy 3:15, NKJV. (See also 1Corinthians 15:1-5, NKJV; Romans 1:1,2, NKJV.)

Apart from its revelation in the word of God, the concept of the plan of salvation would never "have entered into the heart of man" (1Corinthians 2:6-10).

#### C. It's the fount of spiritual life.

"You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." 1Peter 1:23, RSV.

The Christian life is a life of a new spiritual order (Romans 6:4; 2Corinthians 5:17). We derive this spiritual life from God and sustain it by the Word of God (John 6:63). By receiving this life from the Word of God, we share in the divine nature (2Peter 1:4).

#### D. It inspires faith.

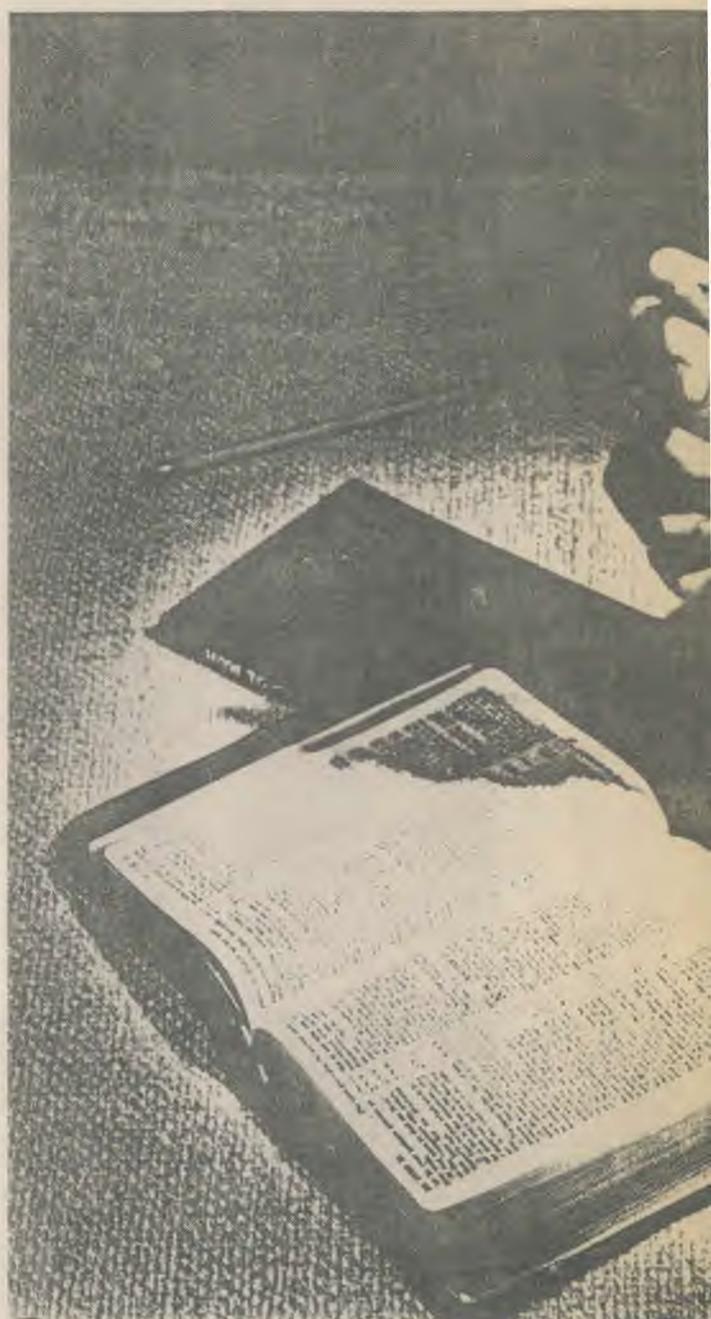
"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17, NKJV. (See also Hebrews 11:6, NEB.) "Faith in God is reason acting reasonable."—John Wesley.

#### E. It satisfies the hunger of the soul.

"Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O

# The All-Su

by A S



# Sufficient Bible

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LORD God of hosts." Jeremiah 15:16, NKJV.

"God will make the most precious revelations to His hungering, thirsting people. They will find that Christ is a personal Saviour. As they feed upon His word, they find that it is spirit and life."

—*The Desire of Ages*, pages 390,391.

## F. It fortifies against temptation.

"Thy word have I treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee." Psalm 119:11, NASB. (See also *The Great Controversy*, page 51.)

## G. It's an unerring guide and counsellor.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Psalm 119:105. (See also Isaiah 30:21, RSV; 2Peter 1:19. Its ethical principles, are the secret of success in every department of life.

## H. It's the source of all truth and the criterion of all doctrine and religious experience.

"Your word is the truth." John 17:17, Phillips. (See also Isaiah 8:20; *Selected Messages*, Book I, page 416; *The Great Controversy*, page vii).

## I. It provides the subject-matter for prayer and is itself a medium of communion with God.

Prayer is our talking to God. The Bible is God talking to us. How important that we spend much time in listening to what He has to say! (See Psalm 85:8)

"The New Testament has one supreme office: it can introduce us into the very presence and companionship of the Son of God.... Through its chapters the Redeemer holds converse with His redeemed."—T H Darlow, *The Greatest Book in the World*, pages 197, 198.

Accordingly, "We never do the Bible greater honour than when we forget that we are reading a Book and find that we are communing with a Person."—Principal Forsyth.

# DIARY OF A BIBLE

JANUARY	<b>15</b>	Been resting quietly for a week. The first few nights after the first of this year my owner read me regularly, but I think he has forgotten me.
FEBRUARY	<b>2</b>	Clean up. I was dusted with other things and put back into my place.
FEBRUARY	<b>8</b>	Owner read me for a short time after breakfast, looking up a few references. Went to church.
MARCH	<b>7</b>	Clean up. Dusted and in my place again. Have been down on the hall table since my trip to church.
APRIL	<b>2</b>	Busy day. My owner being leader at a Bible Search meeting had to look up references. He had an awful time finding one, though it was right in its place all the time.
MAY	<b>5</b>	In Grandma's lap all afternoon. She is here on a holiday. She left a tear drop on Colossians 2:5-7.
MAY	<b>6</b>	In Grandma's lap again this afternoon. She spent most of her time on 1 Corinthians 13, and the last four verses of the fifteenth chapter.
MAY	<b>7-8-9</b>	In Grandma's lap every afternoon now. It's a comfortable spot. Sometimes she reads me and sometimes she talks to me.
MAY	<b>10</b>	Grandma gone. Back in the old place. She kissed me good-bye.
MAY	<b>30</b>	Had a couple of flowers pressed in me today as my owner is taking flower study.
JULY	<b>1</b>	Packed in a case with clothes and other things. Off for a holiday. Still in the case.
JULY	<b>7</b>	Still in the case, though nearly everything else has been taken out!
JULY	<b>10</b>	Case being re-packed.
JULY	<b>20</b>	Holiday over, It was a holiday for me alright! was never used!

# Goodbye, Guilt!

by H M S Richards Jr

**H**elp me, Pastor!" pleaded a desperate young man. "I can't stand this guilt another day; I've just got to make my peace with God."

The minister thought for a moment, then responded. "I'm sorry. There's no hope for you in doing that. Not a chance."

"What!" gasped the poor fellow. "Am I that far gone?"

"You certainly are," the clergyman replied soberly. Then he added with a smile, "But there is some good news for you. The Bible assures you that Jesus has already 'made peace through the blood of His cross!'" (Colossians 1:20).

What we can't do for ourselves Jesus accomplished long ago on our behalf. He invites us to accept the peace He has provided for us. And that's good news indeed!

How can we exchange our guilt for the peaceful confidence that we stand clear and clean before God? Let's look at five basic facts of forgiveness in Romans 3.

**1. We all deserve to die.** "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Nobody's perfect, not even the finest saint. Perfection stretches higher than any of us can reach. We all need a Saviour.

**2. Improved behaviour will not save us.** "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified (declared forgiven) in his sight" (Romans 3:20). From grade school to retirement, our society worships achievement and performance. Salvation, however, comes to us apart from our record of good behaviour. This is hard for us to understand.

**3. Redemption comes as God's completed act.** We are "justified as a gift by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). To extend forgiveness to us, God had to solve a terrible dilemma. Being our Father, He loves us as His precious children—in spite of our sin. But since He also serves as the holy Judge of the universe, God has a solemn obligation to uphold justice.

The penalty of our sin is death (see Romans 6:23), but Jesus took our place. He was "displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood" (Romans 3:25). At Calvary, Jesus paid in His blood the full price of our guilt.

**4. To be forgiven, we must accept God's gift.** He pardons "the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). Although we can't contribute

anything to our salvation, God won't force forgiveness on us. He gives us opportunity to choose, either to accept or to reject our Saviour.

Faith in Jesus means more than agreeing that God exists and applauding the death of Christ for our sins. To be saved from a sinking ship, doomed passengers must do more than believe the lifeboat will float—they must get inside. Even so, faith in Christ means that we trust Him by surrendering our lives completely to Him.

**5. Faith changes the way we live.** "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law" (Romans 3:31). As we learn to appreciate God's love, we begin to reflect that love to those around us. "Love . . . is the fulfillment of the Law," and God's commandments will be reflected in the believer's life of obedience (Romans 13:10).

No matter how mature our Christian growth, we still fall far short of God's glorious ideal. We never outgrow our need for Jesus. How grateful I am that His blood washed away our guilt and that we have peace with God in Him.

How about you?



# THE GODFORSAKEN GOD

by Dwight K Nelson

## **What killed Jesus? Three Roman nails? One centurion's lance? Forty less one flagellations on the back by a legionnaire?**

From a pile of dusty bones in an abandoned crypt his tragic story emerges: name, Jehohanan ben Haggol; nationality, Jew; age, somewhere between 24 and 28 years old; height 5 feet 6 inches; economic status, member of a wealthy family; occupation, no apparent form of hard labour; health, no indication of any serious illness (although the asymmetrical formation of his cranium indicates that in the first weeks of his mother's pregnancy, and again later, shortly before and during his birth, his life was threatened by unknown traumatic events); residence, Jerusalem; date of death, sometime during the 30s or 40s A.D.

And how did the young man die? Violently. The shin of his left leg had been broken, probably by the blow of a club. And presumably as a consequence of that blow, both bones of the right lower thigh had also been broken. Moreover, after he had expired, his feet had had to be

amputated by a hatchet blow in order to remove his body.

Why? Jehohanan ben Haggol was the victim of Roman crucifixion. The five- to six-inch nail that spiked his heels to the cross has been found. (Apparently the bent tip of the nail had become stuck in a knot of wood, which explains the amputation of the young man's feet.) Traces of nail were also found between the radius and cubitus of the left forearm, indicating that his arms as well as his feet had been nailed to the cross. Traces of the cross that were found indicated that it was made from olive wood.

Who was Jehohanan ben Haggol? Nobody knows his story. His dusty pile of bones was discovered by the Israeli Ministry of Housing in June 1968 at a Jewish burial ground in the northern sector of Jerusalem. What makes this archaeological find so significant is that it marks the first time the remains of a crucified man, dating from the Roman era, have been found in an ossuary or depository for bones.

But then the world never needed the tale of Jehohanan to remember the tragedy of crucifixion, did it? The story of another young man on

another Roman cross outside that same ancient city in that same period of history has told the tale all too well. We know what killed Jehohanan ben Haggol. But what killed Jesus of Nazareth?

Late that fated Friday afternoon before the sinking sun turned the sky blood red over the Holy City, what did the somber coroner note on the death certificate as the cause of expiration? What killed Jesus? Three Roman nails? One centurion's lance? Forty less one flagellations on the back by a legionnaire? A twisted crown of thorns plaited and pressed on his bloody brow. Or was it the ejaculatory, spasmodic breathing that eventually suffocates the victim of crucifixion? What killed Jesus?

We're ready with an answer, aren't we? Of course! After all, we've been taught and trained from the very beginning a quick and simple answer to the question: What killed Jesus? Without even thinking we call it out: Our sins! What sins! Well, you know, our pride and self-centeredness, our evil tempers and vile tongues, our lustful hearts and addicted minds, our hate and anger and murder and rebel-

lion, our immorality and impurity, our perverted appetites, our utter faithlessness and dishonesty. In short, all of our sins, they are what killed Jesus that Friday outside Jerusalem.

But is that really the answer? Or could it be that we're so right that in fact we're wrong? Because when we look for the answer to what killed Jesus, we hurry our sanctimonious footsteps to the cross and stand there like all the other theoreticians that Friday. And with our western minds and hearts we analyze the cross, we theorize the cross, we philosophize it, scrutinize it, and even theologize it. And then with a unanimous vote, we declare our sins to have killed Jesus, and we hurry away from Calvary, contented and convinced that we've settled the score and mastered the mystery.

But in going to Golgotha, the problem is that we're 12 hours too late. We took a shortcut and missed the way. The road to Golgotha always leads first through Gethsemane. In fact, Golgotha without Gethsemane is an answer without a question. Which is why if we would know the truth at last, it is imperative that we hasten to the garden before we hurry to the cross.

A handful of young men move silently beneath the still, silver-white moon that stares down upon the slumbering city. Quietly they

hurry out the eastern gate of Jerusalem, descending into a notched valley called Kidron, carefully picking their way across a stream that tonight flows crimson. Bloody waters tonight, for it is the Passover weekend, and the blood of a million slaughtered lambs has been spilled into the scarlet Kidron.

Their voices are hushed and muffled as they climb up the winding road that moves through the moonlit shadows to a garden. The Aramaic name of the garden means "oil press." And not far from the garden entrance there is indeed a "gethsemane," an olive oil press. The group stops beside the gnarled olive trunks that crowd about Gethsemane's gate. A few more muffled words and eight of the young men take up places near the gate. Four others slip into the darker shadows of the grey-green olive tree cover.

the dark mystery, and though they describe it, they will not define it.

"They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled" (Mark 14:32,33,NIV\*).

The Greek words here can be transplanted literally, "a feeling of terrified surprise" came over him. Something began to happen to Jesus!

Is this the same Jesus who just a few minutes ago in the upper room was saying, "I have told you this so that your joy may be complete"? Is this the same Jesus who only hours ago smiled into His disciples' faces, "Let not your hearts be troubled"? Is this the same Jesus who sang with deep fervour the Passover hallel, "Praise the Lord all ye nations, for His merci-

*In Gethsemane the God of the universe—now made man—stumbles deeper into the moon-bathed garden and with a cry falls prostrate on the cold night earth.*

As the four walk, shafts of silver fall upon their faces, and in that dim light we gaze upon a Face that seems strangely twisted and troubled. Something is happening to Jesus, but the Gospel writers are intentionally silent in defining the impending tragedy. In fact, John will breathe nothing about it in his Gospel. Only the synoptic Gospels whisper

ful kindness is great toward us?" If it is, then something dreadful and drastic has fallen upon Him!

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. 'Stay here and keep watch'" (Mark 14:34). Peter, James, John, something's happening to Me. I feel like death is stealing over Me. Stay right here. Don't leave Me now. Pray for

Me. "Going a little farther, he fell to the ground" (verse 35).

Watch with your own eyes as the God of the universe—now made man—stumbles deeper into the moonbathed garden and with a cry falls prostrate on the cold night earth. Clutching the ground as if some dark power was dragging Him into hell. Jesus' anguished voice rends the still night air: "Abba, Father," He cries out (verse 36). Straight out of a young Hebrew child's book of prayers, "Abba" is the Aramaic equivalent to "Daddy" or "Papa," our own children's endearing name for their fathers. "My dear Daddy Father," Jesus sobs into the cold earth, "Take this cup from me" (verse 36). What cup? Ah, Jesus dares not even breathe the unnamed terror that grips His heart. This cup, this cup, O My dear Father, this cup. Short choking sobs. O my Father, take it away. If it is Your will.

Then there is silence . . . with only the convulsing form of the Son of God clinging to the wet earth. Slowly, Jesus staggers to His feet. He will return to His closest companions, for surely as they have witnessed His deep anguish, they will have words of human comfort for Him. But alas! The marred form of God made flesh is greeted only by the heavy snoring of the three." 'Simon,' he said to Peter, 'are

you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour!' " (verse 37). Tragic, isn't it? All He asks for is just one hour. Is it too much for the suffering Christ to ask of you? An hour with Miami Vice, an hour with the New York Mets or San Francisco 49ers, an hour at the mall, an hour with the *Wall Street Journal*, an hour with the golf clubs or basketball, an hour at a party, an hour with our family and friends. But no time left for Jesus? "Could you not keep watch with me for an hour?"

Can we even comprehend what this Man, this God-man, is going through? What do the Scriptures declare? "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"

knew no sin? The Scripture is clear that Jesus was sinless. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (2Corinthians 5:21). "One who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1Peter 2:22). What did it mean for One who was sinless to willingly let sin play out its ultimate wage and consequence in Himself? It meant that He must suffer eternal death, eternal separation from the Source of all life. And who is that Source? Why, of course, it is God, the One with whom the preincarnate Christ shared eternity past! Never to see God again, never to be again

*If Calvary is about human pain, then there have martyrs who have suffered more intensely than Christ on Calvary.*

(Romans 6:23). Sin pays a wage, and the wage is death. What kind of death? Since its antithesis is eternal life, then, it follows that sin's wage is eternal death. And so "we see Jesus, who . . . suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9). What kind of death did He taste and suffer? The death every human being deserves as a rebellious sinner, eternal death. For "the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

And what did that mean for Jesus? For Him, who

with His Father, that Being who once was His eternal Partner and Companion, the One with whom He shared love before there was a universe to share!

Sometimes I return home late at night and find that my wife, weary after a day of mothering our two children, has collapsed asleep in bed. There is the sliver of light from the half-ajar closet door, I gaze onto her slumbering face. And I wonder how I could ever survive being separated from her. It's bad enough when I must be away for a weekend or a week. But

for eternity? To be cut off from her love forever? My heart shudders at the thought! For there is nothing in this life and no one in this world that could persuade me to give up the life and the love we share together!

And yet there is Jesus, clinging, clawing to the Gethsemane ground, crying out in heartbroken sorrow, "O My Father, My beloved Father, take this cup from Me if it is Your will."

"Three times has He uttered that prayer. Three times has humanity shrunk from the last, crowning sacrifice." "The awful moment had come—that moment which was to decide the destiny of the world. The fate of humanity trembled in the balance. Christ might even now refuse to drink the cup apportioned to guilty man. It was not yet too late. He might wipe the bloody sweat from his brow, and leave man to perish in his iniquity" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 690).

Do you think He suffered alone? Never. Our hearts can be certain that the fallen Lucifer, the angelic rebel of God, was cloaked in the black shadows of Gethsemane. It's all or nothing for the arch-enemy of heaven and the human race. If Christ walks up Calvary and dies as the eternal demonstration of divine love and the eternal consequence of human sin, then it will sound the death knell for Satan and his legions. And so with the blasting fury

of hell, while the disciples sleep, the one who stalked Jesus in the wilderness storms Him in the garden. "Let them die, let them die, let them die," he must have shrieked into the heart of the God-man. "Walk away and save yourself, Jesus . . . go home to your Father where You belong . . . this is my world and my kingdom . . . and they all belong to me . . . look at them, your closest friends on earth . . . sleeping while you suffer . . . they don't care . . . nobody cares . . . not even God cares anymore . . . so go home to Abba, where You belong . . .

Was it a temptation for Jesus? The bloody ground over which He cried in the silver darkness of Gethsemane is answer enough. The cup of mystery nearly spills from His hand, but with a final agonized cry into the night Jesus collapses to the ground. "His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself . . . Having made the decision, He fell dying to the ground" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 693).

So great was His agony of heart that Christ would have died in the darkness of Gethsemane had it not been for the angel Luke described descending from the throne room of the universe with the assurance of His Father's love (see Luke 22:43). Let the disciples sleep on; this angel will wipe the bloody brow of his beloved Commander. And Jesus will be given sufficient

strength to walk out of Gethsemane and climb up Golgotha. He will save you and me at any cost.

Twelve hours later at noon on Friday Jesus hangs from a Roman cross. His back ribs up and down the splintery wood, a back that has already been ripped into a messy, bloody mass by the tiny pieces of bone and metal balls tied into the Roman *flagrum* or whip. The nerves, the tendons, and the blood vessels of His wrists and feet have been shattered by the three six-inch iron nails that the executioner has hammered through them into the wood. Nailed in a position that was cruelly intended to bring on spastic strangulation of the breathing process, Jesus tries to curl Himself up in order to gasp for air. But to do so He must jam His weight against the wrist wounds and rub His shredded back against the cross in a desperate effort to expand His diaphragm and chest long enough to suck in some more air. Pushing up on His nailed feet places all the weight of His body on the tarsals, producing a searing pain. It is no wonder the Latins coined the word, *excruciatus*, which means, "out of the cross," from which we get our word, *excruciating*.

As a consequence, we have come to envision the cross as the ultimate in physical suffering, haven't we? After all, it was the excruciating pain

of that barbaric form of torture that bled the life of Jesus away.

But we come to the conclusion only when we have hurried to Golgotha and have neglected to linger first in Gethsemane. For if Calvary is about human pain, then there have been martyrs who have languished for days and weeks in superhuman pain. No, we have missed the critical point if the cross becomes merely a symbol of pain to us. For the difference between martyrs and cancer victims and Jesus Christ is that the former can die with the hope of resurrection from death and reunion with God, but Jesus suffered and died, fearing His death would mean neither resurrection to life nor reunion with His Father. Eternal death, eternal separation—it was with that horror that Jesus walked out of Gethsemane and climbed up Golgotha.

According to the Gospel accounts a mysterious, black, funeral pall cloaked Golgotha and Jesus between noon and three o'clock that fateful Friday afternoon (see Mark 15:33). And in that supernatural darkness the heart of Christ repeated its desperate Gethsemane struggle. Only now what He had dreaded in the garden had become desperate reality atop the mountain. Now there was no "Abba, Daddy, Father" cry from Jesus' shuddering heart. Now in the blackness a voice screams out in anguish,



"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). Sin's crushing, cutting-off separation from God was mysteriously coming true in the dying of Jesus. The universe had never before witnessed the horror of eternal death (or "second death" as John describes it in Revelation 20:6).

True, men and women and children had been dying on this rebel planet for millennia prior to Calvary. But just as he had done with Eve in the first garden (Genesis 3:4), Satan throughout history had waved off sin's resultant death as simply not true. Man can go on living after sinning and dying, he whispered in deception. But now out of another garden comes the horrible reality of a death that means an eternal separation from God, a death

that every rebel must end up choosing if he refuses Him who is eternal life and relentless love. The anguished cry from Jesus' parched lips forever silences the devil's sinister deception that sin's stakes are paltry: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"

Paltry? So high were the stakes to God that He offered up Himself in His Son so that the world—the universe—might forever know the horrendous and bloody price that our sinning and His saving cost.

And therein is the Good News! "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself!" (Mark 15:31). Little did the jeering priests and rabble know that day on Golgotha that they were preaching the greatest news in all the cosmos! It is pre-

cisely because Jesus chose to save us rather than Himself that His soul trembled in Gethsemane and anguished on Golgotha. To save the likes of you and me He was willing to lose Himself! And so on that fateful Friday that has become a forever Friday, it was as if a crimson-dripping sword slashed the lifeline between His heart and His Father. "My God, My God." And Jesus died, the God-forsaken God.

"All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.

"Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror. . . . He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their

separation was to be eternal" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 753).

The God-forsaken God. But why? As we stand between Gethsemane and Golgotha, our hearts are confronted with two undeniable and ultimate realities: How utterly terrible is our sin: but how utterly wonderful is His love. He was willing to be separated from God forever, so that we might be saved by God forever. Forsaken so that we might be found, rejected so that we might be redeemed. He died the second death so that we would have a second chance. In all our feeble human language there is no word for such a sacrifice, save the word *love*.

What killed Jesus? A garden and a cross declare that greater than our sin against Him was His love toward us. That is what took His life on Calvary. The nailed-open embrace of a love that will never let you go.

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38,39). • •

***Jesus was willing to be separated from God forever, so that we might be saved by God forever.***

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# The Innocent Thief

by Joel Thompson

**I**t was lunchtime at Maplewood Elementary School. As usual, the girls sat in groups on one side of the cafeteria, while the boys sat on the other side.

But at one table there was a little boy sitting alone. Brian was very quiet and shy. His clothes were sometimes out of style. The boys often made fun of Brian because he was different.

As Debra started to leave she picked up her notebook. She noticed that her gold pen was gone. "Mary, have you seen my gold pen?"

"No, I haven't seen it," replied Mary.

*Now where could it be?* Debra thought.

As Janice walked back to the table she said, "Debra! Brian has your pen. I betcha he stole it."

"Yeah, you're right, Janice," Mary whispered. "Brian probably did steal Debra's pen. He's a thief."

"Did you hear that?" said one of the boys at the next table as he was loading up his spoon with a French fry. "Brian is a thief."

The word was quickly spreading throughout the cafeteria when the bell rang.

Later during class Brian noticed some of the kids star-

ing at him. A white piece of paper folded very small was being passed secretly from one person to the next. Finally it landed on Brian's desk. He unfolded the paper, and there in big, bold letters read the words "You are a thief!"

"I am not a thief," Brian yelled as he threw the wrinkled piece of paper to the floor. The whole class was silent.

The teacher quickly turned around and asked, "What was that outburst about?" Brian, feeling very embarrassed, couldn't say anything. He just stood there.

"I had a pen, and it's missing," Debra said angrily. "Brian stole my gold pen."

"That's right; he's a thief," the class agreed.

"That's enough," the teacher said sternly as she walked in Brian's direction. "Brian, could you please show us your pen?" the teacher asked softly. Then the teacher took the pen and held it up. "Is this the pen?"

"That's it," the class said, almost in one voice.

"Debra, did you take a look at this pen?" the teacher asked.

"No, not really."

"I didn't think so," Mrs Evans continued. "This is the pen that I gave Brian earlier

today. It was his reward for having the highest grades during the past three months. Why didn't you ask Brian about the pen before you accused him?"

"Well, Carmen said that he stole it," Debra said in a shaky voice.

And Carmen said, "Mary told me he stole it."

Then Mary said, "Janice told us he stole it."

And Janice said, "Well . . . it looked like her pen to me." She was starting to feel a bit foolish.

"I think you all owe Brian an apology," said Mrs Evans, "because he didn't steal anyone's pen. All of you jumped to a false conclusion."

"I'm sorry," the students mumbled.

Suddenly Debra laughed and said, "Oh, look, there's my pen! It's in my desk. It was there all along."

*Lesson:* It is very important to find out *all* the facts before we accuse a person of wrongdoing. The Bible tells us that we must be careful what we say about others, and to be kind to one another. We could save others from getting their feelings hurt if only we would *think before we speak*.