Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction? – A Clear Christian Perspective

Rusty Wright presents a compelling case for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. Looking a four outcomes of the resurrection, he presents a brief case supporting a Christian worldview understanding that Jesus acutallly died and was resurrected from the tomb.

At Easter, some might wonder what all the fuss is about. Who cares? What difference does it make if Jesus rose from the dead?

It makes all the difference in the world. If Christ did not rise, then thousands of believers have died as martyrs for a hoax.

If he did rise, then he is still alive and can offer peace to troubled, hurting lives.

Countless scholars—among them the apostle Paul, Augustine, Sir Isaac Newton and C.S. Lewis—believed in the resurrection. We need not fear committing intellectual suicide by believing it also. Where do the facts lead?

Paul, a first-century skeptic-turned believer, wrote that "Christ died for our sins…he was buried…he was raised on the third day…he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve (Disciples). After that, he appeared to more than five hundred…at the same time, most of whom are still living." Consider four pieces of evidence:

1. The explosive growth of the Christian movement. Within a few weeks after Jesus was crucified, a movement arose which, by the later admission of its enemies, "upset the world." What

happened to ignite this movement shortly after its leader had been executed?

2. The Disciples' changed lives. After Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, most of the Disciples fled in fear. Peter denied three times that he was a follower of Jesus. (The women were braver and stayed to the end.) Yet ten out of the eleven Disciples (Judas committed suicide) were martyred for their faith. According to traditions, Peter was crucified upside down; Thomas was skewered; John was boiled in oil but survived. What turned these cowards into heroes? Each believed he had seen Jesus alive again.

3. The empty tomb. Jesus' corpse was removed from the cross, wrapped like a mummy and placed in a solid-rock tomb. A one-and-a-half to two-ton stone was rolled into a slightly depressed groove to seal the tomb's entrance.

A "Green Beret"-like unit of Roman soldiers guarded the grave. Sunday morning, the stone was found rolled away, the body was gone but the graveclothes were still in place. What happened?

Did Christ's friends steal the body? Perhaps one of the women sweet-talked (karate-chopped?) the guards while the others moved the stone and tiptoed off with the body. Or maybe Peter (remember his bravery) or Thomas (Doubting Thomas) overpowered the guards, stole the body, then fabricated—and died for—a resurrection myth.

These theories hardly seem plausible. The guard was too powerful, the stone too heavy and the disciples too spineless to attempt such a feat.

Did Christ's enemies steal the body? If Romans or Jewish religious leaders had the body, surely they would have exposed it publicly and Christianity would have died out. They didn't, and it didn't.

The "Swoon Theory" supposes that Jesus didn't really die but

was only unconscious. The expert Roman executioners merely thought he was dead. After a few days in the tomb without food or medicine, the cool air revived him.

He burst from the 100 pounds of graveclothes, rolled away the stone with his nail-pierced hands, scared the daylights out of the Roman soldiers, walked miles on wounded feet and convinced his Disciples he'd been raised from the dead. This one is harder to believe than the resurrection itself.

4. The appearances of the risen Christ. For 40 days after his death, many different people said they saw Jesus alive. Witnesses included a woman, a shrewd tax collector, several fishermen and over 500 people at once. These claims provide further eyewitness testimony for the resurrection.

As a skeptic, I realized that attempts to explain away the evidences run into a brick wall of facts that point to one conclusion: Christ is risen.

The above does not constitute an exhaustive proof, rather a reasoned examination of the evidence. Each interested person should evaluate the evidence and decide if it makes sense. Of course, the truth or falsity of the resurrection is a matter of historical fact and is not dependent on anyone's belief. If the facts support the claim, one can conclude that he arose. In any case, mere intellectual assent to the facts does little for one's life.

A major evidence comes experientially, in personally receiving Jesus' free gift of forgiveness. He said, "I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him (or her)."

Worth considering?

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Why Radical Muslims Hate You – Responding to Islamic Attitudes

Rusty Wright looks at the historical roots of Muslim hatred of American and the West. He points out that there are cultural, political, religious and psychological factors combining to create the current attitudes among Muslim people. Understanding the roots behind the feelings of some Muslims toward the West may help us in reaching out to our Muslim co-workers and neighbors.

Historical Roots of Hatred

Do you remember how you felt on September 11, 2001? You likely saw images of jets crashing into buildings, people jumping from skyscrapers, the towers collapsing. What feelings did you experience? Confusion? Anger? Depression? TV showed some Palestinians celebrating. One Hamas publication wrote, "Allah has answered our prayers."{1} In London, one Muslim group circulated stickers praising the "magnificent 19," the hijackers.{2}

Chances are, you are a target of this hatred. If you are a Westerner, an American, a non-Muslim, or a Muslim of a different stripe than they, then some radical Muslims hate you. Why? The answer is complex and involves history, culture, politics, religion, and psychology.

Of course, many – some would say most – Muslims are peace loving and deplore terrorism. Islam is quite diverse.{3} Extremist Muslims do not represent all Muslims any more than white supremacists represent all Christians. Not all "radical"

Muslims are violent or hateful. But understanding extremist Muslim hatred is essential to interpreting our post-9/11 world. This article examines that hatred and offers a biblical response.

In his October 2001 video, Osama bin Ladin mentioned the "humiliation and disgrace" tormenting Islam for "more than eighty years." Princeton Near Eastern scholar Bernard Lewis notes that the reference likely puzzled many Westerners. Many Muslims – for whom Islamic history carries divine significance – understood. Bin Ladin referred to the 1918 defeat of the once- mighty Ottoman Empire and to British and French partitioning of Ottoman territory. Secular Turks soon also abolished the caliphate, or succession of rulers of all Sunni Islam. Desecration of this symbol of Muslim unity has pained many Muslims ever since.{4}

For centuries, the Islamic world had displayed military, economic and scientific superiority. But European development eventually overtook Islam.{5} Today, United States ties with Israel and involvement in Saudi Arabia have kindled ire.

Bin Ladin calls on Muslims to "obey God's command to kill the Americans and plunder their possessions . . . to kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military . . . ."{6} He and his sympathizers want to eliminate Western influence and restore their version of Islam to the world.{7}

Socio-cultural Roots of Hatred

History is behind some of the radical Muslim hatred of the West. But so are cultural differences. Would you believe that dancing in an American church helped fuel Muslim anger today?

In 1948, Sayyid Qutb visited the United States for Egypt's Ministry of Education. His stay left him shocked with what he perceived as moral degeneracy and sexual promiscuity.

He wrote that even American religion was tainted by

materialism and consumerism. Churches marketed their services to the public like merchants and entertainers. Success, big numbers, “fun,” and having “a good time” seemed crucial to American churches.{8}

He especially deplored clergy-sanctioned dances at church recreation halls. When the ministers lowered the lights, the dances became hot. Here is Qutb’s “PG” description: “The dance is inflamed by the notes of the gramophone . . . the dance-hall becomes a whirl of heels and thighs, arms enfold hips, lips and breasts meet, and the air is full of lust.” He cited the famous Kinsey Reports as evidence of American sexual debauchery.{9} Qutb, who was dark skinned, also experienced racism in America.{10}

Back in Egypt, Qutb joined the Muslim Brothers organization.{11} Imprisonment and torture made his writings more militant. Qutb became what Georgetown University religion and international affairs professor John Esposito calls “the architect of radical Islam.”{12}

Some Muslim Brotherhood groups, offshoots, and alumni are mainstream and nonviolent. Others have a violent legacy. A militant offshoot,{13} Islamic Jihad, assassinated Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. Esposito notes that a radicalized former Muslim Brother, Abdullah Azzam, significantly influenced Usama bin Ladin.{14} Former CIA Middle East case officer Robert Baer observes that a Kuwaiti Muslim Brother, Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, became a bin Ladin terror chief.{15}

Secularization, consumerism, materialism, the status of women, sexual mores … all concern radical Muslims.{16} Bernard Lewis notes that Sayyid Qutb’s denunciation of American moral flaws became incorporated into radical Islamic ideology. For instance, he says Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini, in calling the U.S. the “Great Satan,” was being consistent with the Koranic depiction of Satan not as an “imperialist” or “exploiter” but as a seducer, “the insidious tempter who whispers in the

hearts of men."{17}

Historical, social and cultural factors have influenced radical Muslim hatred of the West. Consider now how global politics stirs the mix.

Political Roots of Hatred

Bernard Lewis – who is not without his critics{18} – notes an essential difference between Christianity and Islam regarding government and religion. Jesus of Nazareth, the founder of the Christian faith, said, "Give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God."{19} For much of history, this has been understood as recognizing the existence of two distinct authorities, one spiritual and the other political.{20}

But much of Islam has known no such distinction. Muhammad was both a religious and political leader, the Prophet and the head of state. Under his successors, the caliphs, Islam grew into a huge empire and world religion. Islamic shari'a, or Holy Law, deals with power, authority and political philosophy. Specific applications differ among Islamic nations. In an extreme example of this spiritual/political blend, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini once said, "Islam is politics or it is nothing."{21}

With this mindset, the Western world and the United States as superpower become to many Muslims the infidel invaders, imperialist bullies who desecrate Islamic states by force. European colonialism, Western imperialism and U. S. policies are frequent Muslim complaints.{22} Many Muslims deplore the U. S. invasion of Iraq. Of course, U. S. concessions to Israel often are seen as collaboration with an enemy of Islam.

One perceived offense to radical Islam that is sometimes overlooked by Westerners is Western complicity with corrupt rulers of Islamic states. These situations are complex. Oft-

mentioned offenses include the 1982 government massacre at the Syrian city of Hama to put down a Muslim Brothers uprising. An estimated ten to twenty-five thousand died, attracting little Western attention. In 1992, with Western approval, the Algerian military cancelled democratic elections to prevent the Islamic Salvation Front from winning them and established a brutal regime.{23}

Especially galling to radicals is Western complicity with rulers of Saudi Arabia – Islam's Holy Land – whom they see as warped by greed, graft and moral corruption. One Saudi diplomat noted after 9/11, "What shocks me most is why they hit America and not us."{24}

But they did hit America, and radical views of politics played an important role.

Religious Roots of Hatred

Still other reasons some radical Muslims hate you involve religion.

Wahhabism, a movement much in the news, was founded by an eighteenth century theologian, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al- Wahhab. Wahhab wanted to purify Islam and return it to its authentic ways. He condemned and burned books contradicting his views. Wahhab's followers became fiercely exclusive. Their principal focus was not outsiders but insiders, Muslims whom they felt had practiced a "less-pure" form of Islam. They could be vicious, desecrating holy places and slaughtering Muslims who differed.{25}

Wahhabism's ongoing Saudi links would propel it into international influence. When Saudi forces conquered Arabia in 1925, they controlled Islam's two most holy cities, Mecca and Medina. When Saudi Arabia became oil-rich, the stage was set. Wahhabism became the "official, state-enforced doctrine of one of the most influential governments in all Islam,"{26} which

hosts annual pilgrimages to Mecca involving millions of Muslims from around the world. Saudi oil wealth funded Wahhabi propagation of their views at home and abroad.{27} Wahhabism affected both Usama bin Ladin and the Taliban.{28}

Wahhabism's pervasive influence troubles Princeton's Lewis. Imagine, he says, that the Ku Klux Klan or a similar group took control of Texas and its oil and could widely propagate its version of "Christianity" through heavily endowed schools and colleges.{29} Georgetown's Esposito distinguishes puritanical, politically conservative Wahhabism from radical, militant Wahhabism.{30}

Former CIA agent Robert Baer notes that Wahhabi soldiers fought the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s, with U.S. support. There, Wahhabis linked with radical followers of Sayyid Qutb, an alliance Baer likens to "mixing nitroglycerin in a blender."{31} A new, more militant strain of Wahhabism developed in addition to mainstream Wahabbism, with a new emphasis on taking the fight to outsiders: the infidels and the West.{32}

After al-Qaeda attacked three housing complexes in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in May 2003, the Saudi government began to crack down on terrorists and violent rhetoric in the mosques. Initial results were mixed. U. S. Ambassador Robert Jordan reported, "We have noticed lately in influential mosques the imam has condemned terrorism and preached in favor of tolerance, then closed the sermon with 'O God, please destroy the Jews, the infidels and all who support them.'"{33}

Psychological Roots of Hatred

In addition to the foregoing, there are psychological factors at work in radical Muslim hatred.

Lewis writes, "Almost the entire Muslim world is affected by poverty. . . ."{34} Georgetown's John Esposito sees "weak

economies, illiteracy, and high unemployment"{35} in many Muslim nations. *Relative deprivation* can be psychologically debilitating. If you are poor, some theories argue, and you see others more prosperous, you may feel inferior, trapped or depressed.

Reports from the United Nations and the World Bank note that Arab nations fall far behind the West in "job creation, education, technology, and productivity."{36} (There are, of course, exceptions.) When global media bring pictures of lavish Western life, frustration burns and some extremists lash out. One Egyptian playwright described these extremists as "pathologically jealous." He said, "They feel like dwarfs, which is why they search for towers and all those who tower mightily."{37}

Feelings of rejection play a part. Many Western societies have been slow to accept Muslims. The father of shoe bomber Richard Reid said of his son, "He was born here in Britain, like I was. It was distressing to be told things like 'Go home, nigger.'"{38}

New York Times foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman speaks of a "*poverty of dignity*" affecting even privileged Muslims. Belief in Islam's superiority contrasted with economic and military disparity in the context of a repressive regime can engender feelings of humiliation, prompting vengeance against the perceived cause.{39}

What is an appropriate biblical response to radical Muslim hatred? A complete answer would take volumes. May I suggest four ideas?

First, *love your enemies*. Jesus of Nazareth taught, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."{40} It is not emotionally easy for me to love Usama bin Ladin or to pray for him. I have to ask God for strength for that.

Second, *support national defense*. Paul, one of Jesus' early

followers, wrote that governments are to "bear the sword" to subjugate evil.{41} The implications are complex and debatable, but the principle of defending against attack is biblical.

Third, if you are not a Muslim, *learn about Islam*.{42} One writer remarked of some of Israeli King David's supporters that they "understood the times."{43} Paul sought to understand cultural and religious views of his day.{44}

And fourth, *befriend some Muslims*, perhaps from your neighborhood or workplace. In humility, learn about their families, their hopes and dreams. If appropriate, discuss your respective faiths. You may be surprised at the similarities. And your kindness may generate warmth toward the spirit that drives your kind behavior and speech.{45}

This article is adapted with permission from Rusty Wright, "Why Radical Muslims Hate You," The Plain Truth, *September/October 2004, 6-9. © Rusty Wright 2004.*

Notes

1. *Al-Riswāla*, issue of September 13, 2001; in Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 156-7.

2. Helen Gibson, "Islam's Other Hot Spots: Britain: No Pause in the Recruiting," *TIME.com*, posted September 7, 2003 at http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101030915/wpakistan.html; from *TIME* magazine issue cover date September 15, 2003.

3. John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), xiii, xx, 225-226, 239.

4. Lewis 2003, op. cit., xv-xviii. Bin Laden is not alone in his concern. For example, the founding leader of Ansar al-Islam, a fundamentalist militia in northern Iraq with

suspected Al-Qaeda ties, sees his work as part of a lengthy Islamic struggle to restore the caliphate. See Neil MacFarquhar, “Islamic Militants Said to Infiltrate Iraq to Battle the U.S. Occupiers,” *New York Times* (AOL edition), August 13, 2003.

5. Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (New York: Perennial/HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 6-7 ff., especially 18-63.

6. Lewis 2003, op. cit., xxvii.

7. Lewis 2002, op. cit., 164-5.

8. Lewis 2003, op. cit., 76-79.

9. Sayyid Qutb, *Al-Islwām wa-mushkilwāt al-hadwāra* (n.p., 1967), 80ff; in Lewis 2003, op. cit., 78-79.

10. John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 57.

11. Lewis 2003, op. cit., 79, 76.

12. Esposito 1999, op. cit. 135, and personal interview, November 19, 2003.

13. Esposito 1999, op. cit., 272, also calls it a “splinter group.”

14. Esposito, personal interview, November 19, 2003; Esposito 2003, op. cit., 7, 19.

15. Robert Baer, *Sleeping with the Devil: How Washington Sold Our Soul for Saudi Crude* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2003), 91-128, 195 ff.

16. See Lewis 2002, op. cit., 64-81 for historical perspective on socio-cultural differences between Islam and the West. See Esposito 1999, op. cit., for additional perspective that

differs from Lewis' on certain key points. See Thomas A. Friedman, *Longitudes and Attitudes: The World in the Age of Terrorism* (New York: Anchor Books/Random House, 2002/2003), 334, 357, ff., for a contemporary journalist's perspective.

17. Lewis 2003, op. cit., 81. The final quotation in the paragraph to which this note refers, "the insidious tempter…", is from Qur'an CXIV, 4, 5.

18. For example, Esposito 1999, op. cit., 219 ff.

19. Matthew 22:21 NLT.

20. Lewis 2002, op. cit., 97.

21. Lewis 2003, op. cit., 5-8; see also Lewis 2002 op. cit., 96-116, and Esposito 2003, op. cit., 67-68.

22. Esposito 1999, op. cit., 45-73, 222.

23. Lewis 2003, op. cit., 103-112.

24. Baer, op. cit., 166.

25. Lewis 2003, op. cit., 120-124 ff.

26. Ibid., 128.

27. Ibid., 123-128.

28. Esposito 2003, op. cit., 5, 7, 16, 48, 108-109.

29. Ibid., 129.

30. Esposito 2003, op. cit., 49, 111, 115.

31. Baer, op. cit., 89-90. Baer here refers to Wahhabis in Afghanistan mixing with Muslim Brothers. Esposito, personal interview, November 19, 2003, feels it is more precise to say that the Wahhabis there mixed with radical followers of Sayyid Qutb.

32. David Van Biema, "Wahhabism: Toxic Faith?", *TIME.com*, posted September 7, 2003, at http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101030915/wwahhabism.html; from *TIME* magazine issue cover date September 15, 2003.

33. Lisa Beyer with Scott MacLeod, "Inside the Kingdom," *TIME.com*, posted September 7, 2003, at http://www.time.com/time/magazine/printout/0,8816,483269,00.html; from *TIME* magazine issue cover date September 15, 2003.

34. Lewis 2003, op. cit., 113.

35. Esposito 1999, op. cit., 241.

36. Lewis 2003, op. cit., 114.

37. Friedman, op. cit., 216. Friedman takes the quote from an unidentified issue of *TIME*. 38. Ibid., 354-355. Friedman cites *TIME* of February 25, 2002.

39. Ibid., 242-243; 355 ff. The argument is not that all Muslims live in abject poverty. Many Muslim nations are oil-rich. But oil wealth does not always filter throughout society. Beyond finances, feelings of relative lack of power, influence and respect on the world stage contribute to the poverty of dignity, Friedman holds.

40. Matthew 5:44 NASB.

41. Romans 13:1-4 NASB.

42. For an example of a Christian reflecting on the essentials of Islam, see Rick Rood's, "What is Islam?, http://www.probe.org/probe-answers-e-mail/cults-and-world-religions/what-is-islam.html" and "Probe Answers Our E-mail: Why Do You Lie about Islam?" http://www.probe.org/probe-answers-e-mail/cults-and-world-religions/why-do-you-lie-about-islam.html".

43. 1 Chronicles 12:32 NASB.

44. Acts 17:16-34.

45. Colossians 4:5-6.

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Are You Listening? Do You Hear What I Hear?

Have you ever missed a great opportunity because you weren't listening carefully? Twenty centuries ago some clues to impending good news of monumental import eluded most folks. Fascinating prophecies of Jesus' birth and life bring revealing insights into your own life today.

Have you ever missed a great opportunity because you weren't listening carefully?

If Mark{1} hadn't been willing to listen, he might have missed some great news. He enjoyed an adequate income, fulfilling work, a comfortable home, and many close friends. Then his employer offered a promotion requiring a move to another state. At first resistant, he eventually decided to listen to the offer and make the move.



Mark's job responsibilities expanded, his growing reputation opened doors for wider influence, and he met and married Gail. Reflecting twenty-five years later, he was glad he had carefully listened to news of the offer.

At a business convention Joan heard a brief announcement of an advanced degree program. Distracted by current concerns, she

dismissed it. When the announcement was repeated the next day, Joan caught something she had missed. The degree would be from one of the most prestigious universities in the world. Her company was encouraging managers to participate, promising them time to study, and offering to help pay for it. Joan investigated, enrolled, and her career was greatly enhanced. "To think that I almost missed the good news about this program because I was distracted," Joan reflected. "What a tragedy that would have been."

Perhaps you, too, have encountered news that first seemed insignificant but later became momentous. Great news isn't always trumpeted by headlines or television broadcasts. Sometimes the best news could slip right by if you're not attuned to its importance.

Twenty centuries ago some clues to impending good news of monumental import eluded most folks. A baby born in relative obscurity in the Middle East was hailed by a few as a future king who would rescue people from their troubles. "Good news of great joy for everyone!" said one announcement of Jesus' birth.{2}

Relatively few contemporaries acknowledged His importance. His followers later showed numerous clues to His identity, prophecies written many years before His birth. You may not share the faith of those early believers, but perhaps you'll find it interesting to eavesdrop on some of the clues, the prophecies. Consider just a few.{3}

Prophecies Fulfilled in Jesus' Birth

The Hebrew writer Micah told around 700 B.C. of deliverance through a coming Messiah or "Anointed One." He indicated this deliverer would be from Bethlehem. He wrote, "But you . . . Bethlehem . . . are only a small village in Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past." {4}

Matthew, a first-century biographer, noted that ". . . Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. . . ."{5}

Isaiah, writing around 700 B.C., foretold an unusual aspect of the Messiah's birth, that He would be *born of a virgin*. He wrote, "The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."{6}

The name "Immanuel" means "God is with us." The indication—to all who were listening—was that God Himself would be physically present with humans through this child. What a promise! What good news to people who often felt abandoned by God.

Matthew recorded this about Jesus' birth:

> Now this is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. . . . Joseph . . . brought Mary home to be his wife, but she remained a virgin until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.{7}

Jewish prophets mentioned several clues about the Messiah's lineage. He was to be a *descendant of Abraham*. Moses, a famous Jewish leader writing fourteen hundred years before Jesus' birth, recorded a prophecy about the Jewish patriarch Abraham. He wrote, "Through your [Abraham's] descendants, all the nations of the earth will be blessed."{8}

The Messiah was also to be a *descendant of Isaac*. Moses recorded another promise. He said, "God told Abraham, ' . . . Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted'."{9} In other words, something important was going to come through the descendants of Abraham and specifically through the line of Isaac, one of Abraham's two sons.

The Messiah was also to be a *descendant of Jacob*. Abraham's

son Isaac himself had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Some ancient Jewish scholars{10} believed that another prophecy that Moses recorded prefigured the Messiah. Moses wrote, “A star will rise from Jacob; a scepter will emerge from Israel.”{11}

Luke, a first-century physician, traced Jesus’ lineage through these three Jewish leaders. He wrote of “Jesus . . . the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. . . .”{12}

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, of a virgin, and from the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The pieces of the prophetic puzzle were starting to become clearer. The details of His life would fulfill the prophecies further.

Prophecies Fulfilled in Jesus’ Life and Death

Though Jesus was born in humble circumstances, learned leaders traveled great distances to hail the child as a king. In His youth, scholars marveled at His wisdom. In His thirties He began to publicly offer peace, freedom, purpose and hope to the masses. His message caught on.

His enemies plotted His demise and paid one of his followers to betray Him. His closest friends deserted Him. He was tried, convicted, sentenced and executed. In agony during His execution He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”{13}

Many hurting people feel forsaken by God. But Jesus’ cry of desperation carried added significance because of its historical allusion. The words had appeared about a thousand years earlier in a song written by Israel’s King David.{14} It said, “All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.”{15} “They have pierced my hands and my feet.”{16} “They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.”{17} Historians record precisely this behavior during Jesus’ execution.{18} It was as if a divine

drama were unfolding as Jesus slipped into death.

Researchers have uncovered more than 300 prophecies that were literally fulfilled in Jesus' life and death. He would be preceded by a messenger who would prepare the way for His work.{19} He would enter the capital city as a king, but riding on a donkey's back.{20} He would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver,{21} pierced,{22} executed with thieves{23} and yet, though wounded,{24} would suffer no broken bones.{25}

In His dying cry from the cross, He reminded His hearers that His life and death were in precise fulfillment of a previously stated plan. According to a biblical perspective, at the moment of death He experienced the equivalent of eternal separation from God in our place. He suffered the divine penalty due all the shortcomings, injustice, evil, and sin of the world, including yours and mine. Then—again in fulfillment of prophecy{26} and contrary to natural law—He returned to life. As somewhat of a skeptic I investigated the evidence for Christ's resurrection and found it to be one of the best-attested facts in history.{27} To the seeker He offers true inner peace,{28} forgiveness,{29} purpose,{30} and strength for fulfilling living.{31}

Jesus' birth, life, and death fulfilled many prophecies. Many of these fulfillments involved details that were beyond His human control. But could this be coincidence? Could the prophecies have been fulfilled by chance?

Prophecies Fulfilled by Chance?

My good friend and mentor, Bob Prall, likes to make a distinction between prediction and prophecy{32} and uses a sports analogy to illustrate that distinction. I got to know Bob when I was a student at Duke University and he was the Campus Crusade for Christ director. Now, sports fans will know that Duke's men's basketball team often has contended for the national title. Alas, the Duke football team has suffered many

losing seasons.

Bob notes that prediction can involve careful analysis of current events to make an educated guess about the future. Stock market analysts, political pollsters, social scientists, and CBS *Survivor* fans all seek to predict outcomes. But prophecy often involves events and situations hundreds of years apart or without apparent human connection. Bob explains that if someone were to study the Duke men's basketball team and announce they would win the national championship, and then it happened, that would be successful prediction. But if someone evaluated the Duke *football* team and announced they would win the national championship, that would be prophecy!

Could the 300 prophecies Jesus fulfilled have been fulfilled merely by chance? Peter Stoner, a California mathematician, once calculated the probability of just eight of these 300 prophecies coming true in one person due to chance alone. Using estimates that both he and classes of college students considered reasonable and conservative, Stoner concluded there was one chance in 10^{17} that those eight were fulfilled by fluke.

He says 10^{17} silver dollars would cover the state of Texas two feet deep. Mark one coin with red fingernail polish. Stir the whole batch thoroughly. What chance would a blindfolded person have of picking the marked coin on the first try? One in 10^{17}, the same chance that just eight of the 300 prophecies "just happened" to come true in this man, Jesus.{33}

With all these signs, why wasn't more attention paid to Jesus' birth? No reporters with microphones and cameras waited outside the stable to interview the new mom. (Maybe if she'd had quints?)

Some back then were looking for a conquering king promised by Hebrew prophets and did not anticipate a lowly birth. Others

were perhaps too entangled in their own self-importance or preoccupied with the details of life: working, families, relationships, emotions. Maybe they were a bit like us.

What does all this mean for us this Christmas?

Today's Good News

Jesus' "good news" offers a chance to hook into God's unchanging love, to be forgiven of all wrong and to live forever with Him. He can help you accept yourself, replace anxiety with peace and provide the best friends you've ever had.

If His news is so good, why do people still miss it today? Some are enmeshed in careers or relationships that offer little time for reflection. Chasing dollars blinds some. Family strife can make life a blur: teens experimenting with sex or drugs, a spouse wanting out. Western life itself can be exhausting: media overload, the rush to taxi kids or complete shopping, cellphones, beepers, PTA, soccer practice, e-mail, laundry, Web surfing . . . Help! Maybe you could use some time to reflect.

I suspect you've had hints of God's good news. Maybe you've admired the majesty of the universe and wondered Who was behind it. Perhaps a friend told you their story of faith. Maybe a magazine article got you thinking.

For eighteen years I heard the story of Jesus but did not understand it. The summer before entering university, I wrestled with concern over my own afterlife but gave up because it seemed too complicated. That fall I met some vibrant Christians whose love, joy, and enthusiasm attracted me.

They told me I could not earn eternal life. Rather I needed to receive Christ's free gift of forgiveness accomplished by His death for my sins and His resurrection. They told me all this

would be a “gift of God; not . . . a result of works, so that no one . . . [could] boast” about it.{34} That was good news to me. I accepted His gift of forgiveness and have found Him to be a wonderful friend.

Life hasn’t been perfect. I’ve had my share of domestic strife, job conflicts, and minor health struggles. God never promised perfection, painlessness, or complete prosperity in this life. But He does offer unusual peace, pardon from guilt, ultimate purpose, and the inner power to cope with any struggle. He promises to cause “all things to work together for good” to those who love Him.{35} He is a friend who will never leave.{36}

Might this Christmas season be a good time for you to ask God to forgive you and become your friend? It’s a decision that only you can make for yourself. You can simply talk to Him right now, ask Him to forgive you and become your friend forever. Then contact this station or visit the Web site Probe.org to learn more about a relationship with God.

Maybe there’s some good news for you in the story of Jesus. Do you hear what I hear? Are you listening?

*This article is adapted from Rusty Wright, “Are You Listening? Do You Hear What I Hear?” *Pursuit* VII: 3, 1998, pp.12-15. Copyright © 1998 Rusty Wright. Used By Permission.

Notes

1. Names and some details in certain stories in this article have been altered for privacy while preserving the points of the stories. Details of stories that name me personally have not been changed.

2. Luke 2:10 NLT.

3. Adapted from Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, Calif: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972)

147-157 ff.

4. Micah 5:2 NLT.

5. Matthew 2:1 NASB.

6. Isaiah 7:14 NIV.

7. Matthew 1:18, 24, 25 NLT.

8. Genesis 22:18 NLT.

9. Genesis 21:12 NLT.

10. McDowell, op. cit., 154.

11. Numbers 24:17 NLT.

12. Luke 3:23, 34 NASB.

13. Matthew 27:46 NIV.

14. Psalm 22.

15. Psalm 22:7 NIV.

16. Psalm 22:16 NIV.

17. Psalm 22:18 NIV.

18. Matthew 27:39-44, 35; John 20:25.

19. Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:1,2.

20. Zechariah 9:9; John 12:15; Matthew 21:1-9.

21. Zechariah 11:12; Matthew 26:15, 27:3.

22. Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34, 37.

23. Isaiah 53:12; Matthew 27:38.

24. Isaiah 53:5; Zechariah 13:6; Matthew 27:26.

25. Psalm 34:20; John 19:33, 36.

26. Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:31-32.

27. See McDowell, op. cit., 185-273.

28. John 14:27.

29. Colossians 1:14.

30. Matthew 28: 18-20.

31. Galatians 5:22-23.

32. Bob Prall, *The Master Plot of the Bible* (Houston: Emmaus Books Trust, 1997) 56; Bob Prall, *As You Are Going… Make Disciples* (Houston: Emmaus Books Trust, 2001) 108-109.

33. Peter W. Stoner, *Science Speaks* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969) 99-112.

34. Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB.

35. Romans 8:28 NASB.

36. Hebrews 13:5.

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Advocacy Apologetics: Finding Common Ground as a Way to the Gospel

As you examine your life, can you think of any lessons you wish you had learned earlier than you did?

I'm really glad I learned *this* lesson very early in my career as a Christian communicator. It's made a world of difference.

God has graciously sent me presenting Christ and biblical truth on six continents before university students and professors, on mainstream TV and radio talk shows, with executives, diplomats and professional athletes.

He's put me speaking in university classrooms and auditoriums, in embassies, boardrooms, and locker rooms. He's had me writing for mainstream newspapers, magazines, and on the Internet about controversial subjects like sex, abortion, the afterlife, and reasons for faith.

As you might imagine, I've encountered many skeptics and objections to faith. I've learned much from my critics, the unpaid guardians of my soul.

But if I hadn't learned this crucial lesson at the outset, would all those outreach doors have opened?

The Lesson

I learned it on an island in a river in Seoul, Korea. Over a million believers were gathered for Explo 74. One speaker that day was a prominent church leader from India who discussed how to best communicate the message of Jesus to the types of Buddhists in India. Here's my paraphrase of his advice.

We could use two methods, he said. One was to begin by stressing the differences between Buddhism and Christianity. But that often gets people mad and turns them off.

A second way involved agreeing with the Buddhist where we could. We could say something like this: "I know that you as a Buddhist believe in Four Noble Truths." (This is foundational to many strains of Buddhism.) "First you believe suffering is universal. As a follower of Jesus, I also believe suffering is everywhere. It needs a solution.

Second, you believe that suffering is caused by evil desire or craving. I believe something very similar; I call this evil desire sin.”

Third, you believe that the way to eliminate suffering is to eliminate craving. I feel selfishness needs to be eliminated, too. And fourth, you feel we eliminate craving by following the Eightfold Path: right understanding, right aspiration, right behavior, etc.

Here’s where I would suggest an alternative. For many years I, too, tried to eliminate my selfishness by seeking to think and do the right thing. But you know what happened? I became very frustrated because I lacked the power to do it. I realized that if I relied on God, He could give me the inner power I needed.”

Do you see the contrast between those two methods of approaching someone who differs with you? The first emphasizes differences and has the emotional effect of holding up your hands as if to say “Stop!” or “Go away!” The second begins by agreeing where you can. Your emotional hands are extended as if to welcome your listeners. If you were the listener, which approach would you prefer?

Start by Agreeing where You Can

In communicating with skeptics, start by agreeing where you can. You’ll get many more to listen.

I call this approach Advocacy Apologetics. You’re approaching the person as an advocate rather than an adversary. You believe in some of the same things they do. Expressing agreement can penetrate emotional barriers and communicate that you are *for* that person rather than *against* them. It can make them more willing to consider areas of disagreement.

Don’t compromise biblical truth; but agree at the start where you can.

Paul used this approach. He wrote (1 Corinthians. 9:19-23 NLT, emphasis mine):

> *I have become a servant of everyone so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Jews, I become one of them so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Gentiles who do not have the Jewish law, I fit in with them as much as I can.*
>
> *Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ. I do all this to spread the Good News.*

Here's an experiment: The next time you encounter someone who differs with you, take a deep breath. Pray. Ask God to help you identify three areas of agreement. Can't find three? How about one? Discuss that first. Become an advocate for them. Maybe you'll oil some stuck emotional and intellectual gears and nudge someone in His direction.

Confessions of a Cellphone-Challenged Journalist

I have a confession.

Not one of those tawdry confessions, but it is a little embarrassing. You see, I am cellphone challenged.

I used a cellphone once – about ten years ago when volunteering to help rebuild Miami after Hurricane Andrew. The BellSouth loaner, a real clunker, helped me navigate the

storm-ravaged county amidst downed street signs and landmarks.

But I've never owned one. Voicemail takes my messages and I've seldom wanted to be more accessible. Some of my friends swear by cellphones. Others swear at them. Ever been in a movie theater when a filmgoer gets a call and decides to talk?

My wife attended a conference presentation during which a woman asked the speaker a question from the audience. In the middle of her question, with all eyes on her, her cellphone rang. She not only answered it, but also conducted a brief conversation while everyone watched aghast.

Airline travelers talk before takeoff until the flight attendant tells them to stop. They resume talking when the plane lands. They talk walking through the airport, on the inter-terminal shuttle, entering the restroom. They talk while using the toilet or washing their hands. Some restrooms sound like offices.

Drivers talk. Beachgoers talk. Students talk between classes. Shoppers talk while cruising the aisles. ("What kind of cheese did you want me to get?")

Some restaurants ask diners not to use cellphones. Some summer camps have banned them because they distract kids from social and recreational activities.

My doctor's office has a sign asking patients to please not talk on cellphones while the doctor or nurse is examining them. (Let your mind wander on that theme for a moment.)

One of my favorite signs is inside a nearby church: "Please turn off cellphones during service. (Let God call you.)"

The hit movie, "Bruce Almighty," depicts God's attempts to contact the main character (played by Jim Carrey) by leaving a number on his pager. Turns out the number is valid in many area codes. After the film's release, people and businesses

began getting calls from folks asking for God.

A Florida woman threatened to sue the film studio after 20 calls per hour clogged her cellphone. A Denver radio station built a contest around the fluke. Some callers to the station seemed to think they'd really discovered a direct line to God. One left a message confessing her adultery.

Another number holder decided to offer some friendly advice. She changed her voice message to say, "Looking for God? Well, I'm not Him, but I do know Him. And knowing Him has changed my life. You can know Him too. In fact, it's a local call."

Come to think of it, that may not be a bad idea. Jeremiah (the Jewish prophet, not the bullfrog) said God told him, "Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know." It doesn't even require a cellphone.

I guess I can live with cellphones if people can realize that they're not for everyone. If you have one, I certainly don't fault you. But please, do turn it off when you go to see the doctor.

M.I.T. Dean's Pants on Fire

George Washington, call your agent. America needs your "I cannot tell a lie" message. A national lecture circuit slot just became available.

A popular dean at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has resigned after admitting resume padding and living a 28-year lie. Ouch. Her sad story is filled with irony—lots of fresh material for your speeches.

Marilee Jones says, “I have resigned as MIT’s Dean of Admissions because very regrettably, I misled the Institute about my academic credentials. I misrepresented my academic degrees when I first applied to MIT 28 years ago and did not have the courage to correct my resume when I applied for my current job or at any time since.

“I am deeply sorry for this,” she continues, “and for disappointing so many in the MIT community and beyond who supported me, believed in me, and who have given me extraordinary opportunities.” {1}

The Boston Globe reports that her resume claimed degrees from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and two other New York institutions, but that she has degrees from none of them. RPI says she attended as a part-time student for about nine months but earned no degree. The other two say they have no record of her attending.{2}

Ironically, as *The New York Times* notes, Jones was widely admired, almost revered, for her humor, outspokenness and common sense. {3} She had won prestigious MIT awards{4} and earned a national reputation as a champion for reducing college admissions pressure on students and parents.

It gets worse. She coauthored the book, *Less Stress, More Success: A New Approach to Guiding Your Teen Through College Admissions and Beyond*. On integrity, it says, “Holding integrity is sometimes very hard to do because the temptation may be to cheat or cut corners. But just remember that what goes around comes around, meaning that life has a funny way of giving back what you put out.” {5}

Doesn’t it.

Lots of people lie. Some get caught. The US military reportedly distorted Pat Tillman’s and Jessica Lynch’s stories, allegedly to boost war efforts. Enron executives cooked books for personal gain.

Employees falsify expense accounts or call in sick. Kids disavow breaking windows. Adults tell fish stories. Wandering spouses work late at the office.

Distorting the truth can bring esteem, opportunity, money, thrills. One innocent lie can require cover-ups. Soon the web becomes complex.

We've all made mistakes. As a teen, I valued my reputation for honesty but made some poor choices, lied about them, and nearly was expelled from school. My confronters forgave me and offered me another chance. The episode helped point me to personal faith. I learned that Moses, the great Jewish liberator, warned his compatriots against violating divine prescription: "Be sure your sin will find you out."{6}

Mine found me out. Marilee Jones deceit found her out, as readers from *The Times* of London to *The Times of India* now know.

Jones likely needs privacy—as she has requested—plus good friends, close counsel, and lots of prayers. Perhaps, after recovery, she can help others resist similar temptations.

So, President Washington, what lessons from this episode will your lecture tour emphasize? How about these: Tell the truth. It may be painful but it's the right thing to do. It's easier to remember. You'll sleep better and enhance society.

Pack your saddle bags, Mr. President. Crank up the PowerPoint. Be sure to include a Pinocchio cartoon and some slides of cherry trees.

Oh, but sir, we understand that the cherry tree story might be mere legend. We suggest you explain that to your audiences and give plenty of real-life illustrations.

Notes

1. Statement by Marilee Jones, MIT News, April 26, 2007,

web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2007/admissions-jones.html, accessed April 27, 2007.
2. Marcella Bombardieri and Tracy Jan, MIT dean quits over fabricated credentials, *The Boston Globe*, April 27, 2007, tinyurl.com/3ynyhv, accessed April 27, 2007.
3. Tamar Lewin, "Dean at M.I.T. Resigns, Ending a 28-Year Lie," *The New York Times*, April 27, 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/04/27/us/27mit.html?hp, accessed April 27, 2007.
4. MIT Admissions Web site profile, www.mitadmissions.org/Marilee.shtml, accessed April 27, 2007.
5. Lewin, loc. cit.
6. Numbers 32:23 NASB.

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"Mistakes Were Made"

If you're the nation's top cop, you know it's a bad day when pundits compare you to Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake.

Under fire from solons of both parties for the controversial dismissal of eight US attorneys, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales met the press. Were the dismissals politically motivated? Who suggested them and why? Inquiring minds wanted to know.

Gonzales assured his critics he would get to the bottom of this. Mistakes were made, he explained.

Admitting mistakes can be constructive. The problem, of course, was Gonzales' ambiguous undertone. Was it honest confession or artful sidestep?

Confession or Sidestep?

Maybe mistakes were made means, Somebody messed up royally. We're investigating thoroughly, so please sit tight. We'll name names soon.

Or it could mean, I know who botched this. But I don't want to point the finger directly at me or my colleagues, so I'll throw up a vague camouflage.

Maybe Gonzales meant the former. Critics cried foul. *The New York Times* called it an "astonishingly maladroit…Nixonian…dodge."{1} Administration inconsistencies about who-did-or-knew-what-when did not help quiet skeptics. Who would take responsibility? Ghosts of Janet, Justin and the 2004 Super Bowl reappeared.

Timberlake's press agent announced back then, "I am sorry if anyone was offended by the wardrobe malfunction during the halftime performance."{2} Jackson told a press conference, "If I offended anybody, that was truly not my intention."{3} William Safire has identified a special verb tense for similar nonconfession confessions: "the past exonerative."{4}

True Confessions

What did Gonzales mean? I don't know; I'm still watching. But the "mistakes were made" flap illustrates the need for guidelines for fessing up when warranted.

How about, I was wrong; I'm sorry; please forgive me?

That's seldom easy. Its risky. Makes you vulnerable to your enemies.

Duke political science professor Michael Munger observes that many politicians seem reluctant to admit faults: "I wonder if some capacity for self-delusion is a requirement for being a politician."{5} Munger also notes that business star Henry Ford was reputed to have exemplified the doctrine, "Never apologize, never explain."{6} Literary giant Ralph Waldo

Emerson claimed, “No sensible person ever made an apology.”{7}

Reminds me of the editor who, when asked by an exasperated reporter if he’d ever been wrong, replied, Yes. Once I thought I was wrong, but I wasn’t.”

Could big egos that drive success be rendering some folks relationally and ethically flawed?

Plastic Buckets

My second year in university, I swiped a plastic bucket from behind the lectern in the psychology lecture hall. It had been there every day during the semester. No one wants it, I convinced myself. It deserves to be taken. I used it to wash my car.

Two years later, I considered a biblical perspective: If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth. But if we confess our sins to … [God], he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.{8}

That bucket kept coming to mind. I needed to admit my theft to God and make restitution.

My booty long since lost, I purchased a new bucket and carried it sheepishly across campus one afternoon. Finding no one in the psychology building to confess to, I left the bucket in a broom closet with a note of explanation. Maybe a janitor read it. My conscience was clear.

We all probably have some plastic buckets in our lives, observed an associate. If you do, may I recommend honesty for easier sleeping? Oh, and if you happened to be the owner of that bucket I stole, I was wrong. I’m sorry. Please forgive me.

Notes

1. “Politics, Pure and Cynical,” (Editorial), *The New York Times*, March 14, 2007; http://tinyurl.com/yvnjyd, accessed March 18, 2007.
2. John M. Broder, “Familiar Fallback for Officials: ‘Mistakes Were Made’,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 2007; http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/14/washington/14mistakes.html, accessed March 18, 2007.
3. Robert J. Bliwise, “We Apologize: The Sorry State of Remorse,” *Duke Magazine* 90:3 May-June 2004; http://www.dukemagazine.duke.edu/dukemag/issues/050604/apologize1.html, accessed March 18, 2007.
4. Diane Hartman, “Watching My Language” (Book Review of William Safire’s *Watching My Language*), *Denver Post* Online, “September 14” (no year given); http://extras.denverpost.com/books/book23.htm, accessed March 18, 2007.
5. Bliwise, loc. cit.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid. It is unclear from the text whether Munger or Bliwise supplied the Emerson quotation.
8. 1 John 1:8-9 NLT.

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Giving Can Improve Your Health; Science Says So

Want happiness and fulfillment in life? Then practice giving, advises an influential medical professor.

It really is good to be good, claims Stephen Post, Ph.D., professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Science says it is so.

Post and coauthor Jill Neimark present evidence in their recent book, *Why Good Things Happen to Good People*.{1} As head of an institute supported by philanthropist Sir John Templeton{2}, Post has funded over fifty studies [related to giving] at forty-four major universities. He's convinced that giving is essential for optimum physical and mental health in a fragmented society.

Post says research has produced remarkable findings: Giving protects overall health twice as much as aspirin protects against heart disease. If pharmaceutical companies could charge for giving, we might see ads for Give Back instead of Prozac, he speculates. One program, Rx: Volunteer, has some California HMO physicians giving volunteerism prescriptions to their Medicare patients.

All You Need is Love?

Post and Neimark say around 500 scientific studies demonstrate that unselfish love can enhance health. For instance, Paul Wink, a Wellesley College psychologist, studied University of California Berkeley data that followed about two hundred people every decade since the 1920s. Giving during high school correlated with good mental and physical health across life spans. Givers experienced these benefits regardless of the warmth of their families, he found.

Other research says that giving correlates with lower teen depression and suicide risk and with lower depression among the elderly. Studies at Stanford and elsewhere found links between frequent volunteering and delaying death. Post says giving even trumps receiving when it comes to reducing mortality.

Give more; enjoy life and live longer? Maybe, as Jesus famously said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."{3}

Illustrations abound of givings personal benefits. Millard Fuller, a millionaire, gave away much of his wealth at age thirty. He and his wife, Linda, sold their business and affiliated with Koinonia Farm, a Georgia Christian community. They built houses in Zaire and then founded Habitat for Humanity in 1976 to help needy people build affordable homes. Fuller's goal was to eliminate poverty housing from the face of the earth. Get rid of shacks!

Today Habitat volunteers have constructed over 225,000 houses, helping over a million people in over 3,000 communities worldwide. Countless volunteers attest to the personal satisfaction their involvement brings.

From Playmate to Orphan Care

Post and Neimark relate an intriguing tale of a former *Playboy* model who has devoted her life to helping poor kids in Haiti. Susan Scott Krabacher's childhood helped her connect with the hurting children she now serves. Sexual abuse, her mother's psychiatric breakdown, multiple foster homes, and her brother's suicide took their emotional toll. In her late teens, she became a *Playboy* centerfold and moved into the Playboy mansion.

Ten years of playing mixed with depression. Eventually she reconnected with the faith of her youth. Observing Haiti's poverty prompted her to learn more of the biblical take on life. The foundation she and her husband started runs three orphanages for 2,300 children. "I work long hours," Krabacher notes, "put up with unbelievable sacrifice, bury too many children, and get no compensation but love, which is the greatest freedom you can know and the most important thing in the world."

Post would agree. Do you desire happiness, love, safety, security, loyal friends, true connection, or a benevolent and hopeful world? He has one answer: Give. Youll be happier,

healthier, and live longer. Love cures, wrote the esteemed psychiatrist Karl Menninger. It cures both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it.

Notes

1. Stephen Post, Ph.D., and Jill Neimark, Why Good Things Happen to Good People (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), www.whygoodthingshappen.com.
2. Institute for Research on Unlimited Love: www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org.
3. Acts 20:35 NASB.

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Giving Can Be Good for You: Science Says So

"All You Need is Love"

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is essential for optimum physical and mental health in a fragmented society.

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Other research says that giving correlates with lower teen depression and suicide risk and with lower depression among the elderly. Studies at Stanford and elsewhere found links between frequent volunteering and delaying death. Post says giving even trumps receiving when it comes to reducing mortality.{5}

Give more; enjoy life and live longer? Maybe, as Jesus famously said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35 NASB). Both Jewish and Christian biblical texts admonish us to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; Mt. 22:39 NIV). I don’t know about you, but I find it fascinating to explore these ways that contemporary science and social science often highlight the value of ancient biblical principles.

Post presents research to support the value of ten ways of expressing giving love. Here we will examine four of them: compassion, humor, loyalty, and listening.

“Love cures,” wrote the esteemed psychiatrist Karl Menninger.

It cures “both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it.”{6}

Compassion’s Benefits

Illustrations abound of giving’s personal benefits.

Millard Fuller, a millionaire, gave away much of his wealth at age thirty. He and his wife, Linda, sold their business and affiliated with Koinonia Farm, a Georgia Christian community. They built houses in Zaire and then founded Habitat for Humanity in 1976 to help needy people build affordable homes. Fuller’s goal was “to eliminate poverty housing from the face of the earth. Get rid of shacks!”{7}

Today, Habitat volunteers have constructed over two hundred twenty-five thousand houses, helping over a million people in over three thousand communities worldwide.{8} Countless volunteers attest to the personal satisfaction their involvement brings. And they’re in over ninety countries. In Amman, Jordan, for example, I had lunch with the Habitat director there who involves compassionate volunteers in the Middle East.

As I reflect on his work, I’m reminded of another Middle Eastern leader who showed great compassion. One of His followers wrote, “When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36 NIV).

Stephen Post says “we’re hardwired to open our hearts and to care—and in fact, compassion is important for the survival of the species.”{9} He cites preliminary psychological research in which “compassion significantly reduced depression and stress.”{10}

In that light, consider the intriguing tale of a former *Playboy* model who has devoted her life to helping poor kids in

Haiti. Susan Scott Krabacher's childhood helped her connect with the hurting children she now serves. Sexual abuse, her mother's psychiatric breakdown, multiple foster homes, and her brother's suicide took their emotional toll. In her late teens, she became a *Playboy* centerfold and moved into the Playboy mansion.

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Humor – Good Medicine

There are intriguing parallels between some modern social scientific findings and time-tested biblical life-lessons. One of these involves humor. An ancient proverb says, "A joyful heart is good medicine" (Prov. 17:22 NASB).

Humor heals. Think about how you felt the last time you roared with laughter. Maybe a funny movie, a family situation, or an uproarious joke session had you even crying and gasping for air. Your abdominal muscles and heartbeat went wild. One Stanford psychiatrist "found that a hundred laughs is the aerobic equivalent of ten minutes of rowing."{12}

Stephen Post sees humor as a way to help others, "a very effective way of connecting, of lightening another's life as well as our own." Interviews with Holocaust survivors conducted by a Tel Aviv University researcher found that many cited humor "as a way of surviving trauma." Post notes that Ronald Reagan was a master of using humor to put other people

[and perhaps himself] at ease. When President Reagan was shot and at risk of dying, he quipped to the emergency room doctors, “I hope you’re all Republicans.”{13}

Of course, bitter humor can hurt rather than heal. But positive humor can help people relate and communicate openness. Post cites psychologist Robert Provine who monitored and analyzed over twelve hundred “bouts” of laughter in public places. Provine says shared, contagious laughter can be “an important signal you send to someone that says, ‘This is play. I’m not going to attack or hurt you.'”{14}

Humor is also important for a successful marriage, according to University of Washington psychologist John Gottman. He found that coping with issues “through dialogue, laughter, and affection” was a good predictor of whether marriages would last.{15}

On a Detroit TV talk show, the host and I were discussing my book, *Secrets of Successful Humor*. He asked about humor and marriage. I told him, “The secret of our marriage is that we take time two evenings each week to go out to a lovely restaurant. A nice dinner, some candlelight, soft music, a slow walk home. She goes Tuesdays; I go Fridays.”

It hit a nerve. The host roared, long and loud. Contagious laughter spread throughout the studio audience. We all enjoyed some communal fun that helped open us up to each other.

Loyalty Bonds

A famous biblical proverb notes, “A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need” (Prov. 17:17 NLT). Post believes that “Loyalty is love that lasts. . . . The commitment inherent in loyalty defuses our deepest existential anxiety.” He continues: “Broken covenants are hard to restore and never quite attain their state of original trust. It’s not easy to find loyalty in our society.”{16}

Marriage and friendship, of course, can be significant expressions of loyalty. University of Chicago demographer Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher co-authored the book *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially.* Analyzing data from over six thousand families, Waite discovered strong correlations between marriage and longevity. Gallagher says their research demonstrated that, compared to similar singles, married folks "are physically healthier, live longer . . . experience less anxiety, depression, hostility, and loneliness, and are more likely to tell you that they're happy with life in general. They have more sex than single people of the same age." Of course there's a caveat, Post notes. High-conflict marriages bring stress and can lower immune function.{17}

Friendships count, too. University of North Carolina sociologist Rebecca Adams' frequent childhood moves had her attending thirteen schools by the time she entered college. She feels she learned how to *make* new friends but wasn't as good at *maintaining* them. These experiences helped motivate her to study friendship. She's discovered strong links between quality of relationships and mental well-being. Adams notes, "It's been shown over and over again that friendship is more important to psychological well-being than family relations are. . . . Friendships are voluntary. So we'll choose friendships that support our psychological well-being."{18}

Men can learn a lot from women about friendship. Male and female friendship styles often differ, Adams says: "Men define their friendships in terms of shared activities, and women define them in terms of conversation. For men, a friend is their fishing, golfing, or bowling buddy. For women, a friend is someone they can confide in." Of course there are exceptions, but Post notes that emotional intimacy is what nourishes friendships most.{19}

Giving love through compassion, humor, and loyalty all contribute to our well-being. But, is anybody listening?

“I’m Listening”

The television comedy *Frasier* was one of the most popular TV series in U.S. history. It’s been called “a thinking person’s comedy.” Reruns are ubiquitous, about six episodes daily in our area. Frasier Crane, the protagonist, is a caring, sensitive, cultured—but insecure and sometimes pompous—Seattle radio psychiatrist who always greets his callers with, “I’m listening.” Yet sometimes he becomes so wrapped up in himself that he tunes others out. He’s not alone. In one amusing scene, Frasier’s ex wife, Lilith (also a psychiatrist), tries to converse with Frasier’s brother, Niles (yet another psychiatrist), about an especially weighty matter. Niles, focused on a video game, doesn’t pay her sufficient attention, prompting Lilith to exclaim, “Is there a *chair* here I could talk to?”

I confess that in our home, my wife Meg sometimes has to use Lilith’s line to get my attention. (Mind you, I don’t confess that it’s as often as *she* might *claim*!) But listening is a powerful form of affirmation and an important tool in understanding and communication. Solomon, a wise Jewish king, wrote, “What a shame, what folly, to give advice before listening to the facts!” (Proverbs 18:13 NLT)

Stephen Post writes, “When we truly absorb another’s story, we are saying, ‘You count. Your life and feelings and thoughts matter to me. And I want to know who you really are.'” He claims that listening can help both the listener and the one listened to. New studies indicate: “Listening activates the part of our brains hardwired for empathy. . . . When we listen to others in pain, their stress response quiets down and their body has a better chance to heal.”{20}

Post says that without a good listener, we can feel terribly alone, “like the psalmist in the Bible who cries out, ‘No man cared for my soul.'” He continues, “This has led some scholars to call the God of the Psalms a God of listening. Our need for

a listener is an inherent aspect of all prayer."{21}

So, giving love is good for you. Science says so. Compassion, humor, loyalty, and listening are important ways you can express giving love. Is it as intriguing to you as it is to me that contemporary science and social science are often in harmony with age-old biblical counsel? Makes me think I should read the Bible more often.

Notes

1. Stephen Post, PhD, and Jill Neimark, *Why Good Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), 15.
2. Ibid., 1.
3. Ibid., 7.
4. Ibid, 7-8, 48-51.
5. Ibid., 8-10, 68-69.
6. Ibid., 2.
7. Ibid., 25, 275.
8. www.habitat.org
9. Post and Neimark, Why Good Things Happen, 179-180.
10. Ibid., 184.
11. Ibid., 177-8; see also Susan Krabacher (as told to Kristi Watts), "Diary of a Playboy Centerfold," The 700 Club, www.cbn.com/700club/features/amazing/Susan_Krabacher061506.aspx; accessed January 24, 2008.
12. Post and Neimark, *Why Good Things Happen*, 132.
13. Ibid., 133-135.
14. Ibid., 139-140.
15. Ibid., 141-142.
16. Ibid., 199-200.
17. Ibid., 203-205.
18. Ibid., 216-217.
19. Ibid., 221.
20. Ibid., 231-232.
21. Ibid., 234.

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Clonaid and Eternity

Want to live forever?

Got big bucks?

Clonaid founder Claude Vorilhon, who goes by “Rael,” says you’ll be able to gain eternal life through cloning, but it will cost you plenty. Debates surrounding Clonaid sometimes overlook his stated goal.

“The long-term implication, and this is my mission,” Rael told CNN, “is to give humanity eternal life. Cloning is the key to give us eternal life and to cure all disease on Earth, but eternal life is the ultimate goal.”

Rael says cloning babies is only the first step. Next, he speculates, will come “accelerated growth,” bringing a cloned infant to maturity over a few hours. Phase three transfers the data in your brain to your adult clone.

Your memory and personality then inhabit a new body. Your old body can die while you live on. When your cloned body wears out, presumably you can repeat the process and thus live forever. Hopes of connecting with eternity, of course, touch deep human longings.

Rael, who founded the Raelian religion, says he won’t profit directly from the cloning. Clonaid and the Raelian religion seem to be close philosophically but separate financially. Clonaid’s website features Rael quite prominently. Rael says he won’t shun donations from Clonaid.

Referring to Clonaid president Dr. Brigitte Boisselier, Rael says, “It’s a commercial company and her goal is to make as much money as possible, and I hope she will make as much as

possible.”

Hmmm. A religious leader; big money; questionable promises. Sound fishy?

Rael says he encountered a space alien in 1973 in France who told him that extraterrestrials had created life on Earth through cloning. Rael’s mission became to spread the aliens’ message and help earthlings live forever.

Rael claims the alien told him he (Rael) was the brother of Jesus. Jesus, of course, said some significant things about eternal life. Among them: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish.”

Jesus also said that his own bodily resurrection – one of the best-attested facts in history – would validate his claims. Raelians say that aliens using “an advanced cloning technique” raised Jesus from the dead. One problem with this theory involves Jesus’ wounds. To convince his doubting disciple Thomas he had really risen, Jesus showed him the wounds in his hands and side. Thomas believed. Presumably cloning, involving genetic copying, does not reproduce physical wounds.

Jesus and his followers charged nothing for eternal life. It was a “free gift” to all who believed, made possible by his sacrificial death.

Beware of religious leaders promising eternity for a fee.