



Bible Study Guide

No. 34

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Worship That Transforms

By Roy Page

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At the root of all sin is worship—self worship! The Bible calls it idolatry, our human tendency to create God in an image that allows us the freedom to be and do as we please, free from guilt or a sense of condemnation in spite of sin. Even Christians can read Scripture and emphasize those characteristics of God we feel allow us to do what we want to do—rather than what God would have us do. It is all too easy to make God into our own image. C.S. Lewis said God has to continually destroy our own inadequate concepts of God in order to gradually bring us closer to know him as he really is.

In Scripture, when people come into God's presence for the first time they express fear, trembling, and an overwhelming sense of awe. They become painfully aware of their own unholiness. Those who came into the presence of the Almighty—and continued to have contact with him—were never the same again. They eventually became transformed.

When Moses first came into the presence of God at the burning bush, the first thing God told him was, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God” (Exodus 3:5). However, as Moses had increasing contact with God we find that his “hiding from” God gradually turned into a “seeking after” God. He wanted to know him more intimately. “If you are pleased with me,” he later said, “teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you...show me your glory.” That became his heart's desire and he didn't want to go forward without having God's presence with him (Exodus 33).

God honored Moses' request and in his own self-revelation God emphasized his love, compassion, mercy and faithfulness as well as his perfect justice (Exodus 34:5-7). After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, God's decision to deny Moses entrance into the Promised Land was very disappointing to Moses, but his willing submission to God's will is testimony to a transformed life.

In the New Testament we find a similar response of awe when Peter first met Jesus: “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8). But Jesus told Peter not to be afraid because he was going to make it possible for him, and anyone else who so desired, to come into God's presence. Peter became a transformed person—after three years of being with Jesus he said he was prepared to die for him. But the

reality is, to reverse C.S. Lewis's description of Aslan the Lion (Messiah) of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* fame, God is good but he is wild. If a person isn't willing for God to make them holy they need to give him a wide berth for, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). However, for those who accept God's offer in Jesus, and worship him with reverence and awe, transformation—spiritually and eventually physically—is the result. But what exactly is worship? Some Christians tend to limit this word to mean praise. The unfortunate outcome is that some feel that their spiritual status is evaluated by how well they express themselves in song. But Jesus said it is by our fruits that we are known and by our good deeds that God is glorified. As Christian professor Eddie Gibbs wisely points out:

“...worship is designed not to make people feel good about themselves or help them to become better informed about theology and the Bible, but to make them holy.... To worship ‘in truth’ means to worship authentically. We say what we mean. We worship in response to the truth that God has revealed about himself and us. There is always more about God than we can possibly comprehend, and there is much about ourselves that we find difficult to admit and come to terms with.... Once God's majesty and holiness confront us, we cannot avoid realizing our own unworthiness. At this point God graciously invites us to enter into dialogue—a conversation in which it is more important to listen than to speak. The highest form of prayer is one in which we allow God to guide the conversation” (*Church Next*, pages 156-157).

Worship involves deep respect, reverence, honor and awe, and the Hebrew and Greek words reveal some interesting contrasts: “...the Hebrew word translated ‘worship’ in the Old Testament (shachah)...means to lower one's body, or stretch out with one's face to the ground as a means of paying honor, to bow, humbly ask in earnest, do obeisance, to show reverence. In the New Testament, the word for worship, *proskuneo*, means to kiss (as a dog would lick his master's hand), to bow down or crouch closer to, literally or figuratively, to lie flat before someone to show reverence, respect and adoration. The two terms actually describe the difference between the Old and New Covenants. Judson (Cornwall) makes it clear when he writes, ‘The word

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“proskuneo” is far more descriptive than the Hebrew word “shachah” for to the bowing is added kissing, and this requires close contact. We can bow at a distance, but kissing requires close contact”

(James P. Gillis, Dynamics of Worship, page 14).

Idolatry is sinful because we desire to emulate and imitate what or whom we worship. But God desires for us to imitate him, who is both loving and holy (Ephesians 5:1; 1 Peter 1:14 -16). God became human to provide us with a physical example of what it means to imitate him. Apart from Jesus the admonition to “imitate God” would make no sense. To seek to know more intimately that which we worship is exactly what God desires of us in order that we can become more like him:

“This is what the Lord says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Worshiping God in spirit and in truth involves the unique relationship made possible through Jesus Christ: “To practice the presence of God we must become intimately involved with the person of Jesus Christ. The special relationship and corresponding closeness that develop through the act of worship produce an obedience not possible in our own strength” *(Dynamics of Worship, page 15).*

Dynamic relationships are characterized by shared intimacy, deep commitment and passion. True worship engages the mind, heart and spirit; the experience of being in God’s presence changes for the better.

“Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full (or half full) of artificial admirers (like people who write generic anniversary cards for a living). On the other hand, emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates shallow people who refuse the discipline of rigorous thought. But true worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of Biblical worship” *(John Piper, Desiring God).*

God created us with the need to worship—we need it for our emotional and spiritual well-being. Worship can lead to sin and death or to righteousness and life, depending on whom we worship. Jesus warned the Samaritan woman at the well that her people didn’t know whom they were worshipping, despite the fact they worshiped the God of Abraham and based their religion on the books of Moses. But he also made clear that though the Jews knew whom they worshiped, they didn’t worship him in spirit and in truth. Jesus is the key to that kind of worship—living in us through his Spirit.

“I have been crucified with Christ,” Paul said, “and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Seek his presence daily to let him live his life in you and to enable you to worship God. That’s the worship that transforms.

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Tired of Life, With Everything to Live For...

By John Halford

As a member of our local Ministerial Association, I take my turn with a Bible Study at one of the local retirement homes. Folks in these parts tend to live a very long time, and some of the residents are well into their eighties and nineties. And their minds are still sharp. On one evening last February, a lady who will be 100 next year, asked me, "Why has God let me live this long? What's the point?" How do you answer that? I told her I would need to think about it. A week later I was still thinking. When we met together again I said, "I don't have an answer to your question. But let me show you some things in the Bible that I bet you didn't know were there." I asked the group to turn to the Book of Ecclesiastes. It took a few moments to find it. Many of us, even if we have been Christians all our lives, don't really know our way around the Old Testament. Unlike the Proverbs, which are aimed at young people, Ecclesiastes seems to be directed at old folks. The author—it was probably King Solomon—looks back on a long and eventful life. He had "been there, done that" and got just about every T-shirt. He contemplates not only his considerable achievements, but also the futility of it all. It makes for a surprising book. I like it in Eugene Peterson's *The Message* version, which makes the frank, almost cynical observations even more down to earth. It begins, "*Smoke, nothing but smoke... There's nothing to anything—it's all smoke*" (1:1-2), and continues "*What's there to show for a lifetime of work, a lifetime of working your fingers to the bone? One generation goes its way, the next one arrives, but nothing changes—it's business as usual for old planet earth*" (verses 3-4). It continues in this vein through 12 chapters of what seems like glum world-weariness. "*Everything's boring, utterly boring—no one can find any meaning in it.... Boring to the eye, boring to the ear. What was will be again, what happened will happen again*" (1:8-9). "*I tried my level best to penetrate the absurdity of life. I wanted to get a handle on anything useful we mortals might do during the years we spend on this earth*" (2:3).

"But when I looked, I saw nothing but smoke. Smoke and spitting into the wind. There was nothing to any of it. Nothing" (2:11).

"Search as hard as you like, you're not going to make sense of it. No matter how smart you are, you won't get to the bottom of it" (8:17).

As we read these words, everyone murmured in agreement. "Yep—that is how it is." "He got that right." "Yes sir. I feel like that too sometimes." "But, what are things like that doing in the Bible?" someone asked. "I always read the Bible for encouragement. This seems so pessimistic."

"But it *is* how you feel sometimes, isn't it?" I asked. They agreed. Whoever wrote this book certainly understood what it was like to get old. These physical frames, in which we spend the first few decades of life, are not meant to last forever:

"In old age, your body no longer serves you so well, Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints stiffen... The shades are pulled down on the world. You can't come and go at will. Things grind to a halt.... you're well on your way to eternal rest, while your friends make plans for your funeral" (12:3-5).

They laughed at that. It was *so* true.

"Well," I said. "That's the best I can do. I haven't answered the question, but this book shows that it is not wrong for you to ask it. Although the Ancient of Days never experiences senility or the other effects of old age, he has anticipated the kind of things we worry about in the later years. Ecclesiastes is a reminder that you are 100 percent alive until you are 100 percent dead. So, *"Even if you live a long time, don't take a single day for granted. Take delight in each light-filled hour, remembering that there will also be many dark days and that most of what comes your way is smoke"* (11:8).

Eventually it will all become clear. This life, even if it seems to drag on and on, is only the opening notes of a symphony God intends to share with us for eternity. "*The last and final word is this: Fear God. Do what he tells you. And that's it. Eventually God will bring everything that we do out into the open and judge it according to its hidden intent, whether it's good or evil*" (12:13).

It seems that the weary old cynic who wrote Ecclesiastes ended up trusting in God's grace.

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Intelligent Design: What it is... and isn't

By Jay W. Richards

Unless you've been hiding in a cave, you've heard of "intelligent design" (ID) and some of its leading proponents—Stephen Meyer, Michael Behe, William Dembski. Unfortunately, you probably got the media's inaccurate spin. It's so predictable, I sometimes wonder if reporters aren't using computer macros.

The predictably witty headline: "Creationism Evolves." The cartoon-like caricature of the United State's 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial over evolution in the classroom. Conspiracy theories about religious fanatics scheming to smuggle Bibles into the science class as the first step toward establishing a theocracy. Next comes a quotation supposedly representing the view of all "serious scientists," with the phrase "overwhelming evidence" thrown in for good measure.

The story practically writes itself, and it possesses this virtue: it saves the reporter the bother of actually investigating what design theory really is.

"ID is not a deduction from religious doctrine. It simply argues that certain features of the natural world are best explained as the result of an intelligent cause."

Victor Victorian

So what is ID, really? ID is not a deduction from religious dogma or scripture. It's simply the argument that certain features of the natural world—from miniature machines and digital information found in living cells, to the fine-tuning of physical constants—are best explained as the result of an intelligent cause. ID is thus a tacit rebuke of an idea inherited from the 19th century, called scientific materialism.

Natural science in the Victorian Age, or rather, its materialistic gloss, offered a radically different view of the universe: (1) The universe has always existed, so we need not explain its origin. (2) Everything in the universe submits to deterministic laws. (3) Life is the love child of luck and chemistry. (4) Cells, the basic units of life, are essentially blobs of Jelly. Onto this dubious edifice Charles Darwin added a fifth conjecture: All the sophisticated organisms around us grew from a process called natural selection: this process seizes and passes along those minor, random variations in a population that provide a survival advantage. With this, Darwin

explained away the apparent design in the biological world as just that—only apparent.

Each of these 19th-century assumptions has been undermined or discredited in the 20th century, but the materialist gloss remains: There is one god, matter, and science is its prophet. It hides behind its more modest cousin, methodological naturalism. According to this tidy dictum, scientists can believe whatever they want in their personal lives, but they must appeal only to impersonal causes when explaining nature. Accordingly, any who discuss purpose or design within science (the founders of modern science generously excepted) cease to be scientists.

The Universe Strikes Back

There was one problem with this tidy rule. Nature forgot to cooperate. The trouble started in the 1920s when astronomer Edwin Hubble discovered that the light from distant galaxies was "red-shifted." It had stretched during the course of its travels. This suggested the universe is expanding. Reversing the process in their minds, scientists were suddenly confronted with a universe that had come into existence in the finite past. Who knew! Hubble's discovery, confirmed by later evidence, flatly contradicted the earlier picture of an eternal and self-existing cosmos. The universe itself had re-introduced the question of its origin to a community bent on avoiding the question altogether.

This was just the beginning. In the 1960s and '70s, physicists found that the universal constants of physics (e.g., gravity, electromagnetism) appeared finely tuned for complex life. To astrophysicist and atheist Fred Hoyle, this fine-tuning suggested the work of a "super intellect."

Still more recently, growing evidence in astronomy has revealed that even in a finely tuned universe, dozens of local conditions have to be just right to build a single habitable planet.

This growing list of unlikely requirements is only half the story. In *The Privileged Planet*, astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez and I argue that those conditions for habitability also provide the best overall conditions for doing science. The very places where observers can exist are the same places that provide the best overall conditions for observing. For instance, the most life-friendly region of the

galaxy is also the best place to be an astronomer and cosmologist. You might expect this if the universe were designed for discovery, but not if, as astronomer Carl Sagan put it, "The universe is all there is, ever was, or ever will be."

Information Plantation

Of course, even with a suitable environment, you don't automatically get humans or even amoebas. Before the Darwinian mechanism can even get started, it needs a wealth of biological information as part of the first self-reproducing organism. For instance, there's the information encoded along the DNA molecule, often described as a sophisticated computer code for producing proteins, the three-dimensional building blocks of all life. These, in turn, need the right cellular hardware to function. In recent years, philosophers William Dembski and Stephen Meyer have turned this evidence into a formidable argument for intelligent design. Dembski, also a mathematician, applies information and probability theory to the subject. Meyer argues that the usual aimless processes of chance and chemistry simply can't explain biological information and that, moreover, our everyday experience shows us where such information comes from—intelligent agents.

Moving up a level, we find complex and functionally integrated machines that are out of reach to the Darwinian mechanism. Biochemist Michael Behe immortalized some of these in his bestselling 1996 book, *Darwin's Black Box*. Behe argues that molecular machines like the bacterial flagellum are "irreducibly complex." They're like a mousetrap. Without all of their basic parts, they don't work. Natural selection can only build systems one small step at a time, where each step provides an immediate survival advantage for the organism. It can't select for a future function. To do that requires foresight—the exclusive jurisdiction of intelligent agents. That's the positive evidence for design: Such structures are the sort produced by intelligent agents, who can foresee a future function. If you get this point, you've already comprehended more than most journalists writing on the subject.

The New Zoo Review

Moving to the macroscopic world, we see the three-dimensional complexity of many diverse animal body plans (phyla). In the fossil record, these show up suddenly. The problem for Darwinism is not that there are "gaps." Of course there are. Rather, it's the entire fossil record's pattern of sudden appearance of new phyla and persistent morphological isolation

between them. This is not the gradually branching tree of life the Darwinian story leads us to expect. Nor is this an argument from ignorance. In our experience, sudden innovations and massive infusions of information come from intelligent agents. The primary innovations come first (e.g., car, airplane, a new Cambrian phylum) followed by variations on the original form. This is the story the fossil record tells.

The Definition or the Evidence?

At the beginning of the 21st century, we have new evidence and new intellectual tools at our disposal. Standing in the way is the materialistic definition of science inherited from the Victorian Age. If a definition of science conflicts with the scientific evidence, should we go with the definition or the evidence?

To ask the question is to answer it. "Scientia" means knowledge. If we are properly scientific, then we should be open to the natural world, not decide beforehand what it's allowed to reveal. Either the universe provides evidence for purpose and design or it doesn't. The way to resolve the question isn't to play definitional games but to look.

The G-word

Recently, Nobel-prize winning physicist Charles Townes asked, "What is the purpose or meaning of life or our universe? These are questions which should concern us all.... If the universe has a purpose, then its structure, and how it works, must reflect this purpose."

Townes continues: "Serious intellectual discussion of the possible meaning of our universe, or the nature of religion and philosophical views of religion and science, needs to be openly and carefully discussed."

Unfortunately, few are willing to follow Townes' advice. If we talk about ID, we're warned, someone, somewhere, will start talking about God.

But certain ideas in science will always have theological implications. As arch-Darwinist Richard Dawkins so memorably said, "Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist."

Right!

Both Dawkins and Townes agree that ideas in science can have theological implications. Isn't that obvious? Yet in our current climate, even the bare rumor of God causes some to reach for their stash of derisive terms—"theocrat," "fundamentalist," "creationist"—they don't require much imagination. But that response rings increasingly hollow. The genie is out of the bottle, and name-calling and misinformation won't put him back. The mandarins can no longer control the flow of information to

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those who seek it. The implications can take care of themselves. It's time to discuss the evidence.

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Guillermo Gonzalez, of The Privileged Planet: How Our Place in the Cosmos is Designed for Discovery (Regnery, 2004), and contributes to the blog idthefuture.com.

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Way out or way ahead?

By

John Halford and Mary Hammond

The children are neat, polite and disciplined. There is zero tolerance for bullying. The majority of students come from deprived backgrounds, but their exam results are some of the best in the country. The school is run unashamedly on Christian principles, but Muslim, Hindu and agnostic parents line-up to enrol their children. There is a waiting list. A much higher than average percentage of students go on to University and almost without exception they do well.

Whatever else you say about Gateshead's Emmanuel College, you have to admit it works.

So what else is said about it? Well, if you read the popular reports, you'd honestly think the place had been founded by religious bigots and staffed with wild-eyed crackpots, hell-bent on turning out religious fanatics and doing away with 300 years of scientific progress.

That is silly. It is so silly that it is almost not worth dignifying it with an article. Almost, but we will anyway. Because in the current debate over education, what is happening at Emmanuel College needs to be recognised and evaluated fairly. Education is far too important to allow prejudice, bias and bad reporting to form our opinions and cloud the real issues.

A commitment to excellence

Chief sponsor of Emmanuel College and its founder is multi-millionaire car dealer Sir Peter Vardy. His company's headquarters - Reg Vardy PLC are in Sunderland. Emmanuel College was built in a catchment area where 66% of students live in areas of high - or very high - deprivation. Scholastic achievement was among the lowest in the country. Exam results were abysmal, and less than 11% of students stayed for 6th Form and very few went on to University.

Peter Vardy decided to do something about that. He is one of Britain's wealthiest men, with a personal fortune reputed to be about £100 million. He is also a devout and sincere Christian who takes his responsibility to help those less fortunate than himself very seriously.

Although he himself did not do well at school (by traditional standards anyway) he has become passionate about education. Through the Vardy Foundation, he has pioneered a way of combining visionary thinking and excellence in education with sound business practice. He has been instrumental in developing three outstanding schools. There is much to learn here, but it has unfortunately been widely misunderstood. The record needs to be put straight.

Too good to be true?

We talked with Peter Vardy in his spacious, but practical office in the Vardy Headquarters building. We asked him how he, a car dealer, had become embroiled in a row over education.

'I had been looking to see what I could do to put something back into the community' he explained. 'I looked at housing for displaced people, helping drug problems, that kind of thing. Then one night a couple of guys came to tell me about a City Technological College initiative for Gateshead.'

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They explained that it was a new initiative. If they could find the money to build a new school and get it started, the Government would let them run it and still fund the running costs. It sounded almost too good to be true.

It is part of my working out of my Christian faith that we should be helping those less fortunate than ourselves. Helping young people to have a better start in life and education is what I have chosen.' The Vardy Foundation put up the £2 million to build Emmanuel College, which opened in 1990. Almost immediately the school began to produce outstanding results. It also aroused the opposition of the local education authorities.

'At election time in 1992, the local education people came round and told me they would close us down after the election if Labour were to get in. Everyone was worried. So I went and saw the teachers and told them, "I believe the Lord led me to do this so be reassured - your jobs are safe." Labour didn't win, and by the time of the next election the landscape had changed. The same guys came round and said the situation has changed - with New Labour you'll be all right.'

'We were better than all right. The government representatives came up to see what was happening. They interviewed parents, teachers and children and concluded we need more schools like this - not less.' As a result of this and other visits, the concept of the City Academies was born. The idea is for a school to operate as a partnership between local business interests and the educational authorities. City Academies are not private schools, or even 'faith schools'. They must be approved by the Local Education Authorities (LEAs), and adhere to the National Curriculum.

The Vardy Foundation has built two of these schools, in Middlesbrough and Doncaster. They are willing to build several more. Their goal is to have 10,000 pupils in these academies in the North east.

So what is the problem?

Well, a story began to be circulated that Emmanuel College, in spite of its excellent record, was really just a façade for the indoctrination of students with crackpot ideas. The rumour spread that Peter Vardy was a religious fanatic, who refused to allow the Theory of Evolution to be taught in 'his' school. It was claimed that he believed the earth and the universe were created by God in six literal days and nights, and he banned any other explanation being taught to the students.

Peter Vardy didn't seem like a religious fanatic. We asked him how the row got started.

'Well, our policy is to let out the rooms in our facilities to other groups in the community. One day

we hired out a room to a church in Newcastle who had Ken Hamm over from Australia. He obviously is a literal six day creationist and that was the subject of his talk.

In the next couple of days the college was attacked on all sides. They interpreted this speaker as representing Emmanuel's approach. So we ended up being the centre of attention, and the detractors of city academies hooked on to this. I was accused of being a religious fanatic, and of using our sponsorship of the school to indoctrinate children with narrow-minded views.

'The *Guardian* accused me of being a creationist. I said tell me what a creationist is and I'll tell you whether I am one.'

Mistaken identity

Much of this trouble seems to have been caused by journalists who did not do their homework. It is important to understand the difference between a 'creationist' and someone who accepts that God created the universe.

Creationists believe that God made the heavens and the earth in six literal days and nights, and that he did it just a few thousand years ago. They take the accounts of creation in the book of Genesis at face value, even if scientific evidence - and perhaps common sense - points to another explanation. Most people who believe in a Creator do not take the Bible so literally. They accept Genesis as an allegory, and look for some way to reconcile it with genuine scientific discovery.

This is not the place to debate the merits of either position (but see Editorial, page 2). However, it is fair to say that the creationist position could produce an unusual worldview, and if children are being indoctrinated to accept it as the only explanation of reality, parents are right to be concerned.

But was that happening at Emmanuel College?

Not a creationist

Since the detractors have tried to label Peter Vardy as a wide-eyed, science-denying religious zealot, wanting to indoctrinate children with his eccentric ideas, we asked him for his personal views about creation.

'I have tried to point out that I am not a literal six day creationist myself', he explained. 'It is not something I worry about. I believe God created the earth and if he wanted to do it in six days he could. But if it took six million or six billion years, or whatever, it does not make a lot of difference to me. Millions of people around the world also believe that.'

And what about the charge that Emmanuel will not allow evolution to be taught?

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'We teach the National Curriculum, so we *must* teach evolution. We also teach there is a Creator God. It is true there is at least one, possibly even two or three, of our teachers who believe in creationism. But we also have atheist and agnostics. The school is not populated by 100% Christian teachers.'

Morning assemblies at Emmanuel are broadly Christians according to the letter of the law. That's what the law requires, although most schools don't. The law also demands there should be a daily act of worship, but perhaps 75% of secondary schools don't have one and don't care.

But Emmanuel is not a centre for turning out evangelists or fundamentalists. The students come from many backgrounds. Muslim and Hindu parents want to get their children into the school. Nobody is clamouring to take them out.'

Environment for learning

Peter Vardy has not been deterred by this disinformation campaign, and he remains determined to use his resources to make a difference in education. 'I really feel passionate about it - these schools are absolutely fantastic - staffed by wonderful people who have a vision for doing something in education. I want to give them the freedom to do this.'

The atmosphere at Emmanuel College certainly seems to bear this out. We were shown around the school by the Head Boy and Deputy Head Girl. They were courteous and articulate, and had obvious pride in the graffiti-free facilities.

The classrooms were orderly, but not artificially so. It seemed like a good environment for learning - not the free-for-all that some schools have become, where the teachers spend half the time just getting everyone sitting down - and being quiet.

As the bell sounded the end of the school day the corridors filled with very normal looking young people, happy to be let out after a day of study. But it was a disciplined exodus. Emmanuel reminded us of what schools used to be like in our day.

As the busses gathered to take the students home we talked with headmaster Jonathon Winch, and his predecessor Nigel McQuoid who works directly with the Vardy Foundation, and is Chairman of the Board for all three schools.

'We are stricter' Jonathon Winch admitted, 'but children like discipline. They need to know where the boundaries are. We are turning out children who are a cut above the average, in positions of leadership.'

Not just the brightest

A criticism often levelled at schools like Emmanuel is that results are higher because the school can

select only the brightest students. That does not seem to be the case at Emmanuel. Two-thirds of the children come from areas of high deprivation. They are at every stage of the ability graph. But, as Peter Vardy emphasized, 'Just because it is an area of high deprivation it doesn't mean the children are thick. Put us in the worst possible area and we will make the difference.'

At the city academies in Middlesbrough and Doncaster they take the 200 children nearest the gate. Economics is not a factor. There are no fees. Uniforms are compulsory, but they can be provided by the school.

Neither are the schools propped-up by a regular infusion of funds from the Vardy Foundation. If the Foundation was to withdraw its financial support, they could not build any more City Academies, but the schools already established would not be affected. They get the same grants any other local authority schools. The difference is that these funds are administered by professional business people, leaving teachers to get on with the job of teaching. Peter Vardy explains: 'We are amply funded, and if we manage it well there is a surplus. We can do all we want to do. We are managing it by accountants who run businesses. Without being disparaging about how other schools work, they don't have the professional input that we get from a business point of view. We get more for our money. It is a logical marriage of good education practices and sound business management.'

Jonathon Winch believes that a critical part of education is for young people to learn to think for themselves and recognise the controversies. 'We are quite relaxed and comfortable about allowing the debate. At the end of the day we want children's views to be their own. We genuinely have nothing to fear from the truth. You can't live without answers to the questions; Who am I? What is right and wrong? What is true and what is a lie? Young people in their early teens can make decisions that stick with them for life. They need to think it through. We can't make a faith decision for someone else.

'Someone once said that indoctrination is presenting the material and pretending there is no debate. If that is what indoctrination is, then we are not guilty. We think true education is learning how to pick your way through a minefield of different views and asking yourself what makes sense. Education is more than just academic success. That is just a symptom of a successful school.'

Let down

Peter Vardy admits that he has been hurt by the personal criticism. He also feels rather let down by

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some of the Christian organizations from whom he had expected support. But he intends to continue to apply his resources to improve education.

Far from being a religious fanatic, Peter Vardy is a realist. 'I keep talking about common sense. But common sense is not common practice. There is genuine opposition to anybody who wants to do something different. But just give it a chance to succeed. There are a lot of people in education that are calling for a change, and it is a shame they are never allowed to blossom as they could.'

He has proved that putting one or two of these schools in a city raise the standard for everyone. "It isn't just the buildings. It has to be a passion to do things differently - to see lives being changed and opportunities being given. It does not take long to win over the parents. As far as I am concerned it has worked.'

Peter Vardy believes that establishing a City Academy could be a great opportunity for successful businessmen to put something into the community. 'It is a tremendous opportunity to put faith into action. If Christians could develop 200 of these schools, think of the impact. It takes about £2 million, and I know not everyone has that kind of money. But why not have a consortium - 10 people putting in £200,000 each? But it really needs a business leader to head it up, not enthusiastic amateurs.'

City Academies and Emmanuel College may not be the whole answer. But they are certainly a part of it, and what they are accomplishing needs to be evaluated fairly and honestly. It is ridiculous that this generous and successful venture should be known only by the impact of an unfair and groundless smear campaign. Our children deserve better.

'I'd rather be remembered as a man who builds up schools than a car salesman,' Peter Vardy told us. And so he should be.

The Emmanuel Schools Foundation

Mission Statement

- To provide all students and staff with the opportunity to work hard to achieve their personal best
- To encourage personal, moral and spiritual development within a Christian framework
- To create a disciplined, sensitive environment where everyone is equally valued

Core Values

All of our work will be characterised by the following values:

Honourable Purpose

We aim to be positive in everything, doing what is good and aiming to benefit others as well as ourselves.

Humility

We seek to do our personal best without bragging and to encourage others to achieve their best without being critical or jealous of their efforts.

Compassion

We care for those who are in difficulty and who are hurting, recognising that the world does not exist for us alone.

Integrity

We can be trusted to be honest and truthful, to say what we mean and to do what we say.

Accountability

We recognise that having the freedom to express ourselves means we must also accept responsibility for our words, thoughts and actions.

Courage

We aim to do what is right, whatever the cost; we stand up for the weak, whatever the danger; we face our fears and find ways of defeating them.

Determination

We know that hard work and the refusal to give up are essential if we are to achieve anything worthwhile.

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“Quote”

By

Eugene Petersen,
Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places

“The Christian community is interested in spirituality because it is interested in living. We give careful attention to spirituality because we know, from long experience, how easy it is to get interested in ideas of God and projects for God and gradually lose interest in God, alive, deadening our lives with the ideas and projects. This happens a lot. Because the ideas and projects have the name of God attached to them, it is easy to assume that we are involved with God. It is the devil’s work to get us worked up thinking and acting for God and then subtly detach us from a relational obedience and adoration of God, substituting ourselves, our godlike egos, in the places usually occupied by God”.

Faithful Heroes

A study of Hebrews 11:1-7

Hebrews 11 is often called the faith chapter. It tells us how various people responded in faith to what God said to them. But these stories are not told as historical trivia—they encourage us to have faith in our situations, too.

An introduction to faith

The epistle to the Hebrews has just told the readers that God wants his people to “live by faith” (10:38). He wants them to persevere, do the will of God and receive the blessing (v. 36). Christians are people “who believe and are saved” (v. 39).

Chapter 11 then describes what faith is like: Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (11:1). Ancient orators sometimes gave a brief definition of a word they wanted to talk about. This is not a complete definition, but it highlights one characteristic of faith.

Commentators argue at length about the precise meaning of the Greek words used here: Is faith a feeling of being sure (as the TNIV has it), or is it the “substance” (NKJ) of our hope? These debates often miss the point—the author is not trying to define faith, but to describe one of the results it has in our lives. His point is that faith means believing and acting on something we cannot see. This is the quality of faith that the author especially wants the readers to imitate.

This is what the ancients were commended for (v. 2). The element of faith is a thread that runs throughout the history of God’s people, and the author brings it down to the present day by adding, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible (v. 3, referring to Gen. 1:3 and Ps. 33:6).

From the very beginning to the present moment, faith is needed. Creation itself shows that just because something can’t be seen, doesn’t mean that it won’t happen. The author does not say that God made everything out of nothing—he only says that he made the visible out of the invisible; that is the contrast he wants to make. Our future is based not on what we see today, but based on something we do not see: God.

Abel and Enoch

With that brief introduction, the author starts to give examples: By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead (Heb. 11:4).

Genesis 4 actually tells us very little about Abel: He brought an offering, and God looked on him with favor (Gen. 4:4). It does not tell us why his offering was better than Cain’s (in ancient Israel, grain was just as legitimate an offering as a lamb was), and it

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says nothing about faith. Nevertheless, the author of Hebrews assumes that if God was pleased, then Abel must have had faith.

The next example is Enoch: By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: 'He could not be found, because God had taken him away.' For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God (Heb. 11:5, quoting Gen. 5:24).

Again, Genesis says little about Enoch, but Jewish legends said that he was taken into heaven, and this is reflected in the author's comments—that Enoch did not die. God took him because he "walked with God," which our author takes as evidence that he had faith. We do not know exactly what he believed, or what he did.

The readers probably do not need any proof that Enoch had faith, because they already know that Enoch was one of the "good guys." The author is not trying to argue his case with logic here—he is painting a picture, presenting faith not as a strange thing, but as normal for the people of God.

The readers already know that faith is good, but the author is using his skill as an orator to build positive emotions for faith, when the readers already face possibly unpleasant consequences for having faith in Jesus Christ. For Abel, faith meant an early death; for Enoch it meant the opposite. Either way, the people of God need faith.

After these two introductory examples, the author states the lesson he wants to highlight: Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Heb. 11:6). In this little creed, the author reminds us that God rewards the faithful—those who seek him. Although we cannot see him, we have evidence that he exists. In addition to supernatural rewards, faith has natural rewards in the here and now: Faith feels better than fear.

Noah

The author emphasizes his point more by beginning each sentence with "by faith": By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that

is in keeping with faith (v. 7). For Noah, the author has more biblical information: God warned Noah about a flood, told him to build an ark, and Noah obeyed and saved himself and his family (Genesis 6-9).

Noah didn't really condemn the world (God did that, based on their behavior), but his faithful example made it obvious how hopelessly evil the world had become—no one repented even after 120 years of warning. And by his faith Noah became an heir of righteousness—he is the first person in the Bible to be called righteous (Gen. 7:1). As it would later be said for Abraham, "His faith was counted as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). He was considered right with God because he was faithful.

The Greek word *pistis* can mean either faith or faithfulness, and many people have noticed that Hebrews often uses it in the sense of faithfulness, or obedience, and it is sometimes hard to tell whether the author is focusing on belief or behavior.

(Although Paul occasionally uses the same word in the sense of faithfulness, he usually refers to belief.) Obedience is evidence of belief, and both are needed. Noah did what God told him to do because he trusted God—he believed that God would condemn the wicked and save Noah and his family if they built an ark.

Questions for discussion

- If we are certain that something will happen, but it doesn't, is it still called faith? (v. 1)
- The universe is visible, but do we have visible evidence that it was created? That it was created by a command from God? (v. 3)
- How can Abel speak even when he is dead? (v. 4)
- Abel is dead, but Enoch did not experience death (v. 5).
- Why this difference, and where are they now?
- Is it really important for us to believe that God will reward us? (v. 6)
- In what way do people today "condemn the world" by having faith? (v. 7)

Michael Morrison
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Lessons from Mark

Lesson 26 - Mark 4:35-41

A lesson about storms

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."... A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

The crises of life have often been compared to stormy seas. They come upon us whether we like it or not. They terrify us. They knock us around and threaten to destroy all our stability and security. We don't know whether we can survive them. And we don't know how long they will last. At least, that's how a storm at sea would be for most of us. For Jesus, it was just a chance to grab 40 winks.

As Mark tells the story, the disciples were terrified that the boat was going to break up and everyone would die. But Jesus was asleep (on a cushion no less, Mark notes, adding to the contrast between Jesus' tranquility and the disciples' panic), apparently oblivious to their pending doom. They roust him and cry, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (v.38). Of course, Jesus quiets the storm with a word, but then he chides the disciples: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (v.40).

Some of the lessons in the story are obvious. Jesus has power over the storms of life, experiences them alongside us, loves us, saves us from them and wants us to trust him more than we do.

Let's look at a lesson that might not be so obvious. Storms don't worry Jesus. He's right there with us during them, but he's perfectly calm about them. He isn't terrified; he isn't impatient; he isn't worried. In fact, he's so calm, he's asleep. To us, he seems to be asleep at the switch. We wonder why on earth he doesn't get up and do something. We start to wonder whether he even knows the trouble we're in. Whether he cares. Whether he even can do anything about it. Whether he's really all he's cracked up to be.

Like the disciples, we believe he's there. In the disciples' case, they could actually see him lying there asleep. We don't have that luxury. We believe he's there, but most of the time he seems just as asleep as he was during the storm that day on the Sea of Galilee. The psalmist had the same lament in

Psalm 44:23-24: "Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?"

Maybe that's why Mark included this story. The not-so-obvious lesson is that Jesus was just as much in control, and the disciples were just as safe in his hands, while he was asleep as while he was awake. Most of the time, life seems like a relentless voyage from one storm to the next. At least it does for me, and I expect it's the same for you. One thing I've learned about myself is that during storms I'm usually a scared rabbit just like Jesus' disciples were.

But I'm also learning that I can take heart in knowing that Jesus isn't scared, and he isn't depressed. He might be asleep, or he might not be, but either way, like the song says, "He's got the whole world in his hands." Even if he doesn't wake up and quiet the storm, I'm safe with him. And if he does wake up and quiet the storm, he's probably going to say: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

And I can live with that.

Reflection

- Does it sometimes seem that God is ignoring you when you need him most?
- Has a trial you've gone through made you stronger spiritually?
- Do you feel that Jesus should keep you from going through trials?
- When was your faith most tested?
- Why does God let us suffer trials if he loves us?

For further reading:

Where Is God When It Hurts?

by Philip Yancey

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