

PLAIN TRUTH®

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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

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Is everything in the world getting worse and worse?



Ralph Woodrow

There are some who tell us in all seriousness that “everything in the world is getting worse and worse!” It seems popular, even in some pulpits, to talk about how bad everything is getting—“and getting worse all the time!” But the evidence is overwhelming that MANY things are better than they have ever been, especially in countries that enjoy the blessings of civilization.

This is not to say there is not a lot of evil in the world. Many things are not as they should be. Nevertheless, progress has been made in the right direction. In harmony with Philippians 4:8, “... think on things of good report”—let’s consider some of the GOOD things God has blessed us with and for which we should be thankful.

Advances in Travel

In 1917, the main highway through Indio, California had been paved, but there was no white line down the center. While driving her Model-T Ford on this highway, June McCarroll (a female medical doctor) was run off the road by an approaching truck. Because of this near-fatal accident, Dr. McCarroll came up with the idea of a white line in the center of the road.

Unable to get much interest from officials and others about her idea, she hand-painted a white stripe down that stretch of highway. A monument near the intersection of Indio Blvd. and Fargo St. in Indio honors McCarroll as the inventor of the white line, which is now used on highways worldwide.

In October 1819, the first Christian missionaries to Hawaii left Boston for the 18,000-mile voyage around the tip of South America (there was no Panama Canal at that time). After **five months** in cramped quarters, with bouts of seasickness and other difficulties on board the ship, the Hawaiian Islands finally came into view. **Today**, a non-stop flight from Boston to Hawaii takes just over **11 hours!** Flying west (with the sun), a flight leaving Boston at 8:00 AM arrives in Hawaii by early afternoon, at 1:10 PM!

My Aunt Thelma did not live far from the Golden Gate Bridge when it was completed in 1937. Years later, as a boy, I recall her talking in glowing terms about this bridge—how it is supported by cables and can even sway in the wind. I had never heard of a bridge like that! The many wires from which the supporting cables are made, if separated into one continuous length, could wrap around the earth over three times! Each day, people in about 112,000 vehicles cross the bridge. I don’t suppose any of them think things were better when the bridge was not there!

My grandparents migrated from Missouri to California, arriving in Riverside in 1919 with six children. Their oldest son, Edward (from whom I have my middle name), was the only one who knew how to drive a car. Long stretches of the road (later known as “Route 66”) were unpaved. It was the first long distance highway in the United



School Is Out!

You who are young make the most of your youth. Relish your youthful vigor. Follow the impulses of your heart...live footloose and fancy-free—you won't be young forever. Youth lasts about as long as smoke (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10, The Message).

Aaah, summer—that long anticipated stretch of lazy, lingering days, free of responsibility and rife with possibility. It's a time to hunt for insects, master handstands, practice swimming strokes, conquer trees, explore nooks and crannies, and make new friends (Darell Hammond).

The final days of the month of May is a time of the year that most school children look forward to with great anticipation. May is the month, at least for some students who study in public schools here in Southern California, when school lets out for the summer break. There are no more tedious hours of homework to complete. There are no more tests to take. The final bell has sounded across the empty schoolyards for another school year, and all the fun and freedom of summer vacation has begun, at last!

I am quite fortunate, as a parent, to be experiencing all the excitement around the final days of May for a second time in life. I have two stepsons now as a result of my recent remarriage. The boys are ages ten (nearly eleven) and fourteen, and believe me, they both embody the seemingly limitless energy and intense anticipation around being set free for the summer. I remember clearly the same excitement, although somewhat less so, as expressed by

my daughter, years earlier. It is a beautiful reality to re-live the **School Is Out!** excitement all over again. I believe that excitement serves in its own way to help keep me young, at least young at heart.

Can you remember that excitement around the feeling of **School Is Out!?** That unmistakable feeling of boundless energy and eager anticipation in knowing you had the entirety of the summer immediately ahead of you? I remember those days as if they were yesterday—days of nothing but fun and freedom. I must

Jesus, our teacher, has completed our homework and taken our tests. As a result of his saving work, we live free in him.

admit, I have seldom experienced such a carefree sense or feeling since.

As adults, well beyond our school days, we live full lives. We all have many demands upon our time. Rarely, if ever, do we experience that **School Is Out!** feeling of carefree fun and freedom, in the way we did in our youth. The truth is, life often sees to it that **school is never quite out** for us. Life just keeps coming, and we never seem to be short of things to attend to, as it does.

The wisdom we find in the book of Ecclesiastes celebrates youth. The poetry of the book encourages the living of life to the fullest. The humor of the book seems to say, *do so while you can, because someday, you will want to live life to the fullest, as you once did as a young person, but you may find doing so has become much more difficult.* In terms of the timeline of our physical lives, who cannot relate to that?

In terms of the timeline of our spiritual lives, **school is indeed out!** Our lives in Christ Jesus can be just like a summer break, if you will. Our lives in him can be truly fun, and filled with a carefree freedom, as we keep our eyes on him. Jesus, our teacher, has completed our homework and taken our tests. As the result of his saving work, we live free in him.

As Christ-followers, we do have many demands upon our time, and many things yet to learn as we live our lives in him. Christ Jesus is the one at work within us; transforming us into his image for his good pleasure.

As he does so, we can still live our lives physically from our once youthful vigor, living footloose and fancy-free in him. We can follow the impulses of our hearts, for in our hearts is where Christ Jesus lives.

As I experience watching my two stepsons relish the end of another school year, and the fun and freedom that comes with the final days in May, I celebrate the broader and deeper spiritual lessons. Although my body does not make it easy anymore to hunt for insects, master handstands, practice swimming strokes, conquer trees, or explore nooks and crannies in nature together with them, I am grateful. I am grateful that spiritually, **school is indeed out!**

I can live my life from the limitless energy of Christ Jesus within, and the eager anticipation of an eternity with him. I can live my life from the place of deep peace and true joy he provides. And fortunately, I can still do some of the fun physical summer activities with the boys. Thanks be to him for that! □

—Ed Dunn

Continued from page 1

States to be entirely paved, but that was not until 1938.

The contrast between a car similar to the Buick in which they traveled, with what would be considered an *average* car today, is **striking!** Today's cars are thousands of inventions rolled into one. Truly a work of art.

Would anyone want to go back to using a crank to start a car? Or what about rolling down the window, extending the hand and arm to signal a turn? One wonders why it took so long for blinkers to come into existence. The same can be said about seat belts!

Most people who drive *enjoy* driving. This is reflected in advertising jingles from years past: "What a thrill to take the wheel of a smart new Oldsmobile!" or "See the USA in your Chevrolet!"

For quite a few years, some relatives of mine owned a 1941 Packard automobile which they bought new. It was a luxury 4-door sedan, olive green in color, and had a feature that seemed like a novelty at the time—a **heater!** **Today** heating and air conditioning have become standard in cars.

Advances in Technology

I remember the first time I saw a television set. It had been purchased by some neighbors. It had a 7-inch, black and white screen, in a large cabinet. It was overwhelming to me as a boy—to



Some in the 1960s who objected to the U.S. space program cited a passage from the Psalms: "The heavens are the LORD'S: but the earth he has given to the children of men."

be in Riverside and to not only hear, but to be able to see someone in Los Angeles, sixty miles away. But it was happening—somehow an invisible signal was coming through the air and picked up by an antenna on the roof! **Today**, would anyone want to go back to a small screen black and white television? Would we not prefer a large flat-screen with full color?

I recall hearing people in the early 1960s speak in negative terms about the space program. The idea of sending a man to the moon was ridiculed: "*We have not solved the problems here on earth, why would we try to send a man to the moon?*" Some affirmed it would never happen—that God would not permit it. They compared it to those Babel builders who sought to construct a tower into heaven (Genesis 11:1-9). A passage from the Psalms was also quoted: "*The heavens are the LORD'S: but the earth*

he has given to the children of men" (Psalm 115:16).

Today, we all benefit from technology that came out of the space program—the use of satellite communication whereby television programs can be beamed all over the world! Because of satellites, early warnings about approaching hurricanes can save the lives of thousands.

There was a time, not long ago, when we struggled with roadmaps, tried to read street signs or addresses at night, or stopped to ask directions. Now with GPS (Global Positioning System)—an "eye in the sky," as it were—precise directions are provided from an array of orbiting satellites.

Progress in the Right Direction

Years ago, while in Washington D.C., on two occasions I spent time doing research at The Library of Congress. Upon checking in and securing a desk, library workers retrieve the desired books for you. This is necessary because its collection fills about 838 miles of bookshelves! Now, because of the Internet, information from millions of books—"good and evil"—can be accessed right in one's home!

For years I used Strong's Concordance to look up words in the Bible, to find references, and check meanings in Greek or Hebrew. Now, it is simpler to pull up all this information with a computer. In times past, a dictionary (book) was a wonderful

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tool for English word definitions. Now all of this is available online—not only for definitions, but to find similar words, how to use them in a sentence, their etymology, and even the ability to hear how a word is pronounced, in English or some other language!

Was the world or this country better in the days of child labor? *Was it better* in the days of slavery? *Was it better* when travel was in covered wagons? *Was it better* when women could not vote or own property? *Was it better* when lights burned coal oil? Conditions may not be as they should, but on the whole, many have *better* food, *better* clothing, *better* housing, *better* health care, *better* education, *better* working conditions, *better* pay and *better* transportation than in the past.

Today there are organizations to encourage clean, wholesome activities for boys and girls; organizations to aid the blind, the handicapped, the underprivileged, the elderly; organizations to prevent cruelty to animals and provide shelter. Progress is being made in Alzheimer's research. Such things speak of kindness and progress in the right direction.

Despite all the “good things” the Lord has allowed us to enjoy in this day, there are those who suppose things are getting worse all the time. While the Bible does say that “*evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived*” (2 Timothy 3:13), this may simply refer to the fact that one sin leads to another sin; one lie leads to another lie; those who head in the wrong direction get further and further away from Jesus and the gospel.

“*But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day*” (Proverbs 4:18). Where sin abounds, grace shall much more abound (Romans 5:20). Let people of faith everywhere look on the bright side, thankful for the progress that has been made! Is there evil in the world? Yes! No doubt about it. But while “everything” is not as it should be, we are **BLESSED** in many ways! □

Ralph Woodrow, a member of the PTM Board of Directors, has been in Christian ministry since 1958. As an inter-denominational evangelist, he has written many books and has been invited to speak in hundreds of churches in the US and Canada.



In need of mending
from Christless
religion?

Jesus brings hope, comfort,
encouragement & healing.



PTM/CWR — All Jesus, all the time



God Knows Your Name

Greg Albrecht

Cheers was one of the most beloved television sitcoms of the 1980s, following the lives of people who worked in or frequented a bar, which, given its atmosphere of love and acceptance was somewhat like a home away from home. Combined with its “everyone-is-welcome-here” resemblance to the ambiance of a traditional English pub, and given the favorite English salute or toast traditionally given as an alcoholic drink is hoisted, the name of the bar was *Cheers*.

Cheers was far more than a place to purchase and imbibe alcohol—it was a place of fraternity, friendship, socialization, caring and support. The regular patrons of *Cheers* shared their lives—their ups and downs.

Cheers was family—a place of community. Here’s the chorus of “Where Everybody Knows Your Name”—the theme song of *Cheers*:

*Sometimes you want to go
Where everybody knows your name
and they’re always glad you came.
You wanna be where you can see,
our troubles are all the same
You wanna be where everybody knows
your name*

You may have heard that classic definition of home given in Robert Frost’s poem “The Hired Man”—*home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.*

God perfectly knows, embraces

and loves us because *that’s who he is*. He doesn’t have to take us in, rather, he accepts, embraces and welcomes us because *that’s who he is*.

All of our efforts to make a name for ourselves are totally unnecessary. **God knows your name**—he loves you and me because he is our heavenly Father and we are his children. We are his children—**God knows your name!**

We are his flock, but when he sees us, he doesn’t just recognize a large flock of sheep, he knows each sheep by name. When you and I look at a big flock of sheep, we see ...a big flock of sheep. They all look the same. But that’s not the case with the Lord our Shepherd. Every one of his sheep has a name (John 10:3).

Everyone desperately, whether they realize it or not, desires the love of God... and many people contort themselves into knots, they enslave themselves to all kinds of religious rules attempting to gain and maintain God’s love.

Many people alive on planet earth doubt that God loves them, because they cannot imagine God loving them if he really knew them. But God loves us in spite of knowing all there is to know about us.

Loving Another More Than Oneself

There’s a common misconception about the love that married people have for each other. Common sense would suggest that relationships in marriage work best when each partner

accurately sees the strengths and weaknesses of their partner. Research has proven otherwise.

In many cases, relationships in marriage work best when individuals view their spouse in a more positive way than they may even view themselves. This principle might be part of what Paul was getting at in Philippians 2:3 “...*value others above yourselves.*” In many happy marriages, both parties seem to be almost delusional about each other—some might say they have a serious case of “blind love.”

Marriages are often most happy when the two partners concentrate on all that is good and pure and lovely about their spouses rather than what is flawed and imperfect. This kind of love is given not because the recipient of the love deserves it. This kind of love is given not because the lover is blind and incapable of perceiving reality. This kind of love is given and expressed because love sees through rose-colored glasses.

When you think about it, that is exactly what the gospel is all about. The good news is that God chooses to love us in spite of who we are and what we have done. The good news is that God loves us because that’s who God is—**God IS love**. *Love describes God. God defines what love is.*

God does not love us based on how much we do for him... that is the common definition of God that big-business religion would have us believe. God loves you and me

because he willingly chooses to look past our flaws. We are loved by our heavenly Father because we are his children.

The secret ingredient at the heart and core of all institutionalized religion is the fact that all humans want God to love them. Given the fact that all humans desire God's love, Christ-less religion then teaches that God's love is given in a direct and proportionate response to the actions and behaviors of humans who earn God's love.

Can you see why the gospel of Jesus Christ is an enemy of big-business religion? The gospel of Jesus Christ says that you can't earn or deserve God's love—he already loves you. He loves you because *that's what he is and that's what he does*.

The skeptic will say—"Well, so God loves me even if I am a notorious sinner and a despicably evil person? So why should I even try to be a good person when God will love me no matter how rotten I am?"

The skeptical question ignores one reality—when we accept and embrace the love of God, Jesus Christ lives in us and his love, grace and mercy begin to transform our lives. When we accept and embrace the love of God, he begins to produce his love in us—it's called the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit, according to Paul in Galatians 5:22-23, is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

God Loves You—It's Not Too Good to be True!

God loves us but he will not force us to accept and embrace his love. That's the predicament in which many people find themselves. God loves them but they don't know it, and if they've been told he does, they don't believe it because it seems too good to be true.

As far as God is concerned, he loves us right now just as much as he ever has or ever will. That's the

genius—the beauty—the eternal glory of God's love. God's love cannot be affected by our good or our bad behavior—he loves us just as much anyway. We cannot make God stop loving us, and we cannot make him start loving us. We cannot, by our virtuous deeds or our sinful behavior, influence his love for us.

Garrison Keillor, an author and humorist, who became famous for the tales he told on his Minnesota Public Radio Show called "A Prairie Home Companion" once told a self-deprecating story about himself when he was a teenager.

I was walking down the street one day in my Midwestern town and I saw an unbelievably beautiful woman coming toward me. I just had to find a way to get her to notice me. Just then I saw a brand-new Cadillac parked next to the sidewalk.

So I strolled over to the Cadillac, acting like I owned it, pulled out a dime and put it in the parking meter. Then I leaned against the side of the Cadillac, and smiled as the woman continued to walk toward me.

She smiled back! I couldn't believe it! She continued to walk straight towards me... and then, she spoke to me when she got close enough. Giving me another smile, she said, "Thank you" and then she got into her Cadillac and drove away.

If you will forgive the interpretation, God owns the Cadillac. We can't impress him. We can't act like we're going to put a dime in his parking meter or take him for a ride. He loves us because he loves us... not because we actually own or pretend to own a Cadillac.

He knows your name—he knows you don't own the heavenly equivalent of a Cadillac because no amount of work on your part can purchase a heavenly Cadillac. He loves you anyway, and there's no reason for you to try to impress him as if you are something or someone he knows you are not. □



We are his flock, but when he sees us, he doesn't just recognize a large flock of sheep. He knows each sheep by name... Every one of his sheep has a name (John 10:3).



Grandma Said So

Sheila Graham

I *fit isn't worth mending, it isn't worth keeping.* I could still hear my maternal grandmother's words in my ears as I folded the shirt with the tiny hole under one sleeve. *I can wear it once more,* I thought. But grandmother won out. Okay, to be clear, I don't sew anymore, but I still mend if forced to. And, though long gone, my grandmother is still a force in my life.

Same with my mother, a lady who never went out without her makeup, heels and hat. When she remarked that one should "Make Life Pretty," it has become a catch phrase for her grandchildren. To them it means more than creating a beautiful flower garden or perfect lawn or nice home. They use their grandmother's phrase as motivation to overcome any ugliness they face in the world.

Becoming a Mother

Married as a teen, I became a mother at age 20. When I first held that beautiful child in my arms, my whole take on life changed. I became an adult. The thought that I was responsible for this new life was overwhelming. I now understood what my mother and so many other mothers had experienced. For the first time, as I looked into her precious face, I knew here was someone I would sacrifice anything for, even my very life.

My appreciation and love for my own mother also deepened. I always loved her, but now I realized how much of herself she had given up for me. She meant so much more to my entire life than I had ever imagined.

Honoring Mothers

In this country we have set aside a day to honor our mothers, and rightly so. God holds mothers in high esteem. He even used mothers to describe his own comforting love for his people. *"As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you"* (Isaiah 66:13).

He does the same in the New Testament. After warning the people about their religious leaders and severely reprimanding those same leaders,

Jesus cries out in sorrow, describing himself as a mother hen. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing"* (Matthew 23:37).

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians: *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth'"* (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Make a Difference

Mothers and grandmothers make a difference. My mother and grandmothers are gone now, but their influence remains. And, not only parents and grandparents, but other family members, whether parents or not, are part of that familial chain. We are made up of family past, present and future through our influence on our family's offspring, an influence that can go well beyond our families.

Knowing this makes me ask, what kind of influence am I leaving, not only on my children, but on my grandchildren? What will they remember that I said or did 30 or 40 or more years from now? It may not be what first comes to mind. My kids already remind me of sayings or deeds I've long ago forgotten and am amazed they remember.

What difference does it make? Quoting William Barclay: *"It is our terrible responsibility that we leave something of ourselves in the world by leaving something of ourselves in others."*

Only by continuing to look to Christ can we make sure we ourselves are strong links in that ongoing family chain. □

Sheila Graham is author of the popular book, The Proverbs 31 Woman, available on Amazon. She has a master's degree in religion from Azusa Pacific University and a master's degree in women's studies in religion from Claremont Graduate University.



Quotes & Connections



"God's love is a love without limits. God's love is a completely selfless kind of love modeled for us in Jesus' earthly life. God's love is generated in only one way and by one Source—God. God's love is unconditional, in spite of, not because of love. God's perfect love is a love that loves the unlovable."—Greg Albrecht, *Spiritual Soup for the Hungry Soul*, Vol. 1

"Life is a great big canvas, and you should throw all the paint on it you can."—Danny Kaye

"Grandmothers are voices of the past and role models of the present. Grandmothers open the doors to the future."—Helen Ketchum

"Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in."—Robert Frost

"Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."—George Bernard Shaw

"We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future."—Franklin D. Roosevelt

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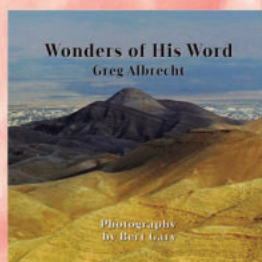
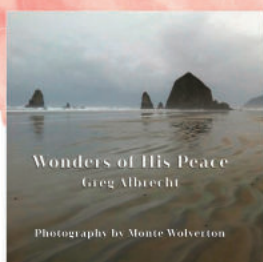
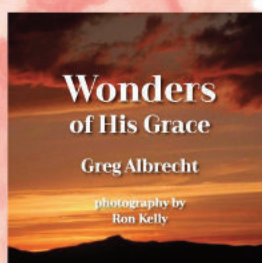
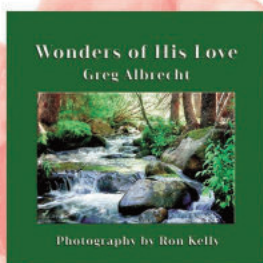
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