



activated

CHANGE YOUR LIFE
CHANGE YOUR WORLD

THE QUEST FOR INDIVIDUALITY

Be all you can be

CONFORMITY OR CONVICTION?

Which will it be for you?

A MAN AMONG MEN

**How one man changed
the world for hundreds**

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PERSONALLY SPEAKING

Some things never change—the question “Who am I?” for example. That search for self is a universal, God-created experience. One thing that *has* changed in the last generation or two, though, is where people are looking for the answer. For many it’s not so much a search to find values and a purpose to base their lives on as a search for an identity, an image, with a heavy emphasis on individuality.

Never has there been so much importance put on expressing individuality as in today’s commerce- and media-driven world. I did a quick search on the Internet and found 153,000 sites telling me how I could express my individuality—and most of them were selling something. There were the obvious ways (choice of clothes, hairstyle, music, diet, or car) and the more extreme (tattoos and body-piercings). These days, anything marketable is fair game. Advertisements pitch items as diverse as custom cellphone tones, artisan metal urns, hand drumming, and charity fund giving—all as means of expressing individuality. What consumers don’t seem to realize is that in their quest for individuality, they end up models of conformity—walking advertisements that promote *other* people’s ideas, tastes, creativity, and enterprise.

What was once a teenage rite of passage now follows us from cradle to grave—literally! A gift card company says, “You want your birth announcement to express your individuality in a special way.” A funeral home says, “Prearrangement means you can express your individuality in a funeral service.”

But stop and think. Are those surface things what make up the *real* you? Or is it the *inner* you, your spirit and the values motivating you and guiding your actions that determine the real you? What do you want to be known and remembered for—the image you project, or the positive influence you have on others? Who *are* you?

Keith Phillips
Keith Phillips

For the *Activated* family



a child's faith

INTELLECTUALITY? —OR SIMPLE FAITH?

Many people strive to gain more and more knowledge, but they'd be happier and wiser in the end if they didn't. Jesus has to get past people's head knowledge to reach their hearts. The Bible warns us to beware of being corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3), and Jesus Himself said, "Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 18:3). If we will recognize that in the Lord's eyes we're just like little children that don't know anything and that He is the One with all the answers, that's being really smart!

DAVID BRANDT BERG (D.B.B.; 1919–1994)

Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354–430 A.D.)

To understand the whole work of the Master is not in my power; but to do His will, written in my conscience, that is in my power, and that I know without a doubt. And when I do this, then undoubtedly I am at peace.

LEO TOLSTOY (1828–1910)

"Jesus loves me, this I know
For the Bible tells me so."
Little children ask no more,
For love is all they're looking for,
And in a small child's shining eyes
The Faith of all the ages lies.

And tiny hands and tousled heads
That kneel in prayer by little beds
Are closer to the dear Lord's heart
And of His kingdom more a part
Than we who search, and never find
The answer to our questioning mind.

For Faith in things we cannot see
Requires a child's simplicity
For, lost in life's complexities,
We drift upon uncharted seas
And slowly Faith disintegrates
While wealth and power accumulate.

And the more man learns, the less he knows,
And the more involved his thinking grows
And, in his arrogance and pride,
No longer is man satisfied
To place his confidence and love
With childlike Faith in God above.

Oh, Father grant once more to men
A simple childlike Faith again.
And, with a small child's trusting eyes
May all men come to realize
That Faith alone can save man's soul
And lead him to a Higher Goal.

HELEN STEINER RICE



CONFORMITY OR CONVICTION?

BY VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG

ONE OF THE MOST COMPELLING STORIES in the Bible is the one about four teenagers, found in the first chapter of the book of Daniel. After the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC, Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar instructed Ashpenaz, the chief of his eunuchs, to "bring some of the children of Israel in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans" (Daniel 1:3–4). In other words, the king's eunuchs were to take these outstanding young Israelites—four of whom were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—and make them real Babylonians.

It goes on to say, "The king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank" (verse 5). After three years of instruction and this special diet, these young servants in training were to stand before the king.

But because the Israelites were forbidden by Old Testament laws to eat certain foods, "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself" (verse 8).

"And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, 'I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces

looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king'" (verse 10).

But Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had made up their minds that they would not compromise their convictions, so Daniel asked if they could eat their own food for 10 days. "'Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants.' ... And at the end of the ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies" (verses 13,15).

It goes on to say, "As for these four young men, God

gave knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.”

At the appointed time, King Nebuchadnezzar interviewed the young men, and “among them all none was found like Daniel, [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego]; therefore they served before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm” (verses 19–20).

How courageous these young men were! It seemed as though much more could have been theirs if they had been willing to conform to the Babylonian way of life, but they wouldn't. As a result, God was able to use them mightily for His glory, and in the long run Daniel was exalted above all the king's other counselors.

As has been the case throughout history, many people today are willing to compromise their principles in order to be accepted or more successful. But this story shows how one such seemingly small decision can have a great effect in the years to come. If Daniel and his friends had compromised early in life, they would not have stood their ground later. Daniel would not have triumphed in the lions' den (Daniel chapter 6), or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace (Daniel chapter 3).

They were in a difficult position and took a stand. We

today who love God and want to stay true to Him are in a similar position, as all around us people try to rule God out of their lives and thoughts and programs. Rock-solid realities—God's sovereignty, the truth of His Word, and godly standards of moral conduct—are being replaced by the shifting sands of apostasy, rationalism, and materialism.

What about you? Will you stand up for your convictions, or go along with the crowd? Will you stand out for Jesus Christ and the only real standard for today, the Word of God, or will you do that which seems more expedient and compromise? Will you take a stand against the world, or cut the corners of bedrock principles and make dim and shadowy the Word of God?

The Kingdom of God is founded on absolute things—absolute truth and candor and sincerity. And always there is the kingdom of evil that is no less absolute in its falseness. The question is whether or not you are going to see that the issues of Christian living and Christian duty are sharply defined.

Will you take a definite stand today? You can't conform to both the things of God and the things of the world. The Christian life is a transformed life, not a conformed life! God's Word says, “They trusted in the Lord and were never confounded” (Psalm 22:5). You will not be confounded if you trust in Him fully and never conform at the price of compromise. □

HAVE CONVICTION, HAVE COURAGE!

To deny self is to become a nonconformist. The Bible tells us not to be conformed to this world either physically or intellectually or spiritually.

BILLY GRAHAM

You have to have conviction, or you have no reason to live. And then you have to do something about your conviction, or you can't stand to live with yourself.

D.B.B.

There's an allegiance that is one and undivided in the Christian. It's a devoted, dedicated life—a life surrendered to the Christian ideal. Therein lies its power.

V.B.B.

The fanaticisms that we should fear most are those that could be confused with tolerance.

FERNANDO ARRABAL

Have courage—moral courage, the courage of one's convictions, the courage to see things through. The world is in a constant conspiracy against the brave. It's the age-old struggle—the roar of the crowd on one side and the voice of your conscience on the other.

**GENERAL DOUGLAS
MACARTHUR**



the quest for

DAVID BRANDT BERG

kinds of real characters! No two people are alike, and there are many big differences that set people apart.

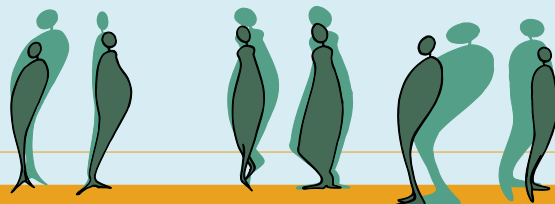
Even if everyone were to believe and apply the Word of God, the Word is *living*, so its results are different in each person's life. For example, if ten people were to read the Bible's famous "love chapter," 1 Corinthians 13, each might get something different from it. One may feel the Lord is telling him to have more outgoing love, another to be less pushy, another to be less proud, another to be less self-centered, and on and on. There is simply no way for people to become "mindless robots" or to lose their intellect or individuality as a result of living the Word!

I understand that if that *were* possible, no one would like that. It would make life boring and unchallenging. But that's *not* possible. In fact, the *opposite* is likely to happen—the closer you draw to Jesus and the more you absorb His Word, the more your own personal gifts and strengths come to the fore. The Lord amplifies and enhances your natural talents and abilities, including your brainpower

LOTS OF PEOPLE HAVE FALLEN FOR THE DEVIL'S LIE that if they read, follow, and obey the Word of God, they'll "lose their individuality." In other words, they believe that if they simply accept the truths of God's Word by faith, they will become just like everyone else and will cease to be a unique, thinking person—that they will lose their "edge," their intellect, and their ability to carry on thoughtful discussions.

If you stop to look around you, though, you'll see that there is plenty of variety, intelligence, and individuality among those who don't adopt this mindset. Within the body of believers who are all trying their best to follow Jesus' teachings, there are all

individuality



“The more of the world you take in, the more you are in danger of becoming a model of someone else’s thinking.”

(all of which came from Him in the first place, by the way), and He makes you an even *better* person—a better *you*. And I’m not just talking about your spiritual life, but your imagination and creativity, your reasoning processes, your decision-making ability, your people-handling skills, and all the rest. The closer you get to the Lord and the more attuned you are to Him, the more of an individual you will become, because He will make you into what He wants you to be, which is different from what He wants anyone else to be.

Even if you were to read all the same Bible passages and memorize all the same Scriptures as a million other people, that wouldn’t take away your uniqueness. How you apply God’s Word in your life and how that Word is manifested in your decisions, your personality, your likes and dislikes, your faith, your reactions, and so on is what makes you an individual. The commitments you make to the Lord, the experiences you go through with Him, the love you give, the ideas you get from Him, the people you influence—all

of that is what makes you who you are and defines who you are, and no one could ever be the same as you. It’s impossible!

You don’t have to reach out to the things of the world to try to establish your individuality. That’s a real trick of the Devil, because you think you’re becoming a different, unique person, but all the while his desire is to make you just like all the others who blindly go after the things of the world.

The Bible instructs us: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:15–16), and “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).

Those who buy into the Devil’s lies end up conforming to the world. Gradually, as they yield their mind and thoughts and choices to the indoctrination of the world, they lose their uniqueness and become just like billions of other people who are in bondage to the darkness. That’s hardly

being an individual!

The more of the world you take in, the more you are in danger of becoming not who the Lord created you to be, but a model of someone *else’s* thinking. Instead of a solid, loving Christian who knows where he’s going and is secure in God’s love, you’ll end up a poor lost wanderer spiritually.

What makes you an individual is not having beliefs that no one else has, but letting your belief in truths held in common with millions of other believers educate, inspire, motivate, and cause you to do things that are unique. The individuality is in what you *do* with your life.

So you have a choice: You can take God’s Word and all that the Lord shows you through your personal connection with Him and become the beautiful individual and unique expression of God’s love that He wants you to be, or you can go the other route and resist the Lord’s instruction, refuse His help, and miss becoming what you could have been. It’s up to you. That’s your freedom of choice, your freedom of thought. □

IT HAPPENED TO ME

A MAN AMONG MEN

“When he looked at each one, he saw a human being, a unique and beloved creation of God.”

IT LOOKED LIKE A SMALL SETTLEMENT—rows of matching buildings on one side and neat vegetable gardens on the other. In the distance was a basketball court. Out further yet, a vendor sold fruit.

I walked up the dirt path behind my father, who chatted with some men as he walked. Small crowds gathered as we passed by. They stared and whispered. Men always stared and whispered.

I didn't know what they were saying, but I walked on, trying not to show any sign of fear.

Was I afraid? Of course! I was 15 years old, these were no ordinary men, and this was no ordinary village. This was the country's national prison, where men were put away and forgotten.

My father and I walked on until we came to a small chapel. A few men had already gathered there, waiting on the benches for some kind of entertainment. It was hot and I wished I were at home, sipping orange juice and watching TV rather than trying to escape the stares of these fellows.

I listened as my father spoke with the inmates. He had a naturally amiable manner. They laughed heartily together, the way men do when they are sharing a good joke. As an ex-



seaman and now a traveling counselor, my dad conversed comfortably with everyone from politicians to drug addicts, and he taught us kids to do the same. But I could not understand the passion that drove him to make these visits to the prison so many days every week.

My father and mother were moved by the plight of others. Our large family could only afford the basics and a few small luxuries, but when they saw the need in others' lives, they tried to help. Dad spoke of building a Sunday school for the inmates' neglected children. He said he would try to organize activities such as sports tournaments and workshops for the men who had whole lifetimes to spend there. He talked of involving my sisters and me with charity projects at orphanages and hospitals. Whatever he did, he tried to

BY NYX MARTINEZ



you were around him, you felt it. A few riffs broke the silence. He began to sing:

Oh Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hands have made,
I see the stars; I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed. ...

His eyes signaled to me. As I joined in on the chorus, so did some of the men. They closed their eyes, as if picturing a wonderful and loving God, a God who ruled the entire universe, yet wanted to be in the heart of every man.

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee,
How great Thou art, how great Thou art.

And then my father read from the Scriptures about such a God and such a love—a love with power great enough to forgive any sin and love any sinner.

That day I understood that this was not just a nine-to-five job for Dad, but a consecrated mission. I could see that he felt compelled to walk among outcasts as Christ had done thousands of years before him. It made no difference that their past was reprehensible and their future bleak. When he looked at each one, he saw a human

“It was a true act of unconditional loving kindness when they accepted that man into our big family and little house.”

do better. Wherever he worked, he could work harder—and he did.

Dad turned and motioned me towards the front. “Come help me sing,” he said.

I stood by his side, facing the crowd of prisoners. They were hushed, expectant. He pulled out his beat-up nylon-string guitar, strapped it on, and thumbed through the hymnal till he came to the song he had in mind. He wasn’t a particularly talented musician, but that didn’t matter. Dad had spirit in everything he did, and when

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Jesus, how I love You! You’ve proved to me over and over again what great love You have for me. I was nothing, yet You came and died for me so that You might always have me with You. You reached down to the depths for me, and I took hold of Your hand. You pulled my spirit up into heavenly places with You, and continue to show me wonders of Your love day after day. You give me so much love, hope, joy, and excitement in the spirit.

Sometimes I get so caught up in other things that I forget to give You the love and attention You deserve and desire. But You still understand and You keep loving me and encouraging me and reminding me that You’re always there, waiting for me to come to You and be refreshed and renewed. Help me, Jesus, to remember to take time with You each day. Amen.

being, a unique and beloved creation of God, and he wanted to make their present world a better place.

Years passed. Dad's visits to the prison chapel marked time for the men. Many of his dreams eventually became realities. The sports league was organized; Sunday school activities were led by the inmates themselves. As a result of my dad's dogged work to raise public awareness of the plight of those in prison, national celebrities came and gave their time and talents to bring some cheer and comfort to those once forgotten men. Sponsorships grew. Dad's seemingly insignificant efforts created a ripple effect that reached into thousands of hearts. Men changed. My father was granted access to any prison ward in the country, and he traveled often into those dark corners, continuing his mission of hope. If he were ever imprisoned for his fanatical faith, Dad sometimes joked, he would feel right at home.

Once I overheard him telling Mom about someone who had served his term and was now a free man. He needed a place to stay while preparing to start a new business and get on with his life, and Dad wondered if we could spare a room in the house for a couple of weeks. I wasn't sure I liked that idea. But if there were any two people practicing what they preached, they were my parents.

It was a true act of unconditional loving kindness when they accepted that man into our big family and little house. He lived with us awhile and observed everything, like the peculiar way all 12 of us children gathered around the eight-seater table for a typical Filipino breakfast of rice, omelets, and dried fish, listening as Dad told his usual "corny daddy" jokes and read the morning devotional.

When this man left our home, he left with a promise that he would give his life to the Lord and support our family in any way he could. When he was eventually able to start a bakery business in the city, he was true to his word and regularly supplied us with fresh bread.

From instances like this, I realized that Dad was changing the world in the best way possible—on a person-to-person basis. Sure, he gathered the crowds, but what he did best was win hearts—one heart at a time, one day at a time.

What drove my parents to carry on with that work despite the many challenges we faced as a family was a passion that I questioned in my early teen years, but I don't anymore. It has been awhile since I left home, and I have since had a book's worth of recollections similar to this one about that day on the prison grounds.

Yesterday, I received an email from my dad, mom, and brothers and sisters still at home. Their volunteer work continues to be taxing, but they will never give it up. It is not just their work; it is their life.

Dad still puts in those hours. Mom still supports him every second. The prison ministry is thriving. Dad writes about taking the kids on the road to every corner of the country, to faraway, exciting places. There they will learn how to reach out to others, how to have a life that is worth living.

Thinking about the lives that have been changed for the better as a result of the way my parents have continued to help others everywhere they walk, be it a high road or low, reminds me of another who walked among men, the One commissioned to bring God's love to the world long ago.

Jesus said, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. ... Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:34–36,40). □

NYX MARTINEZ IS A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN UGANDA.

Q : SOME OF MY FRIENDS seem to analyze and question everything. I can understand their not wanting to blindly conform or believe everything they hear, but their constant questioning often turns to cynicism. I say they're taking their free thinking too far, and they say I am not a free thinker because I hold some truths to be absolute.

What do you say?

YOU'RE RIGHT—it *is* possible to take “free thinking” too far. And, yes, there *are* absolutes.

To show that they can think for themselves, which they consider necessary in order to establish their individuality, some people argue against all right and reason—the godly principles in the Bible, for example. What they don't understand, however, is that such arguments don't originate in their own minds, coming from nowhere. Thoughts are *inspired*, and there are only two sources—good and evil. That's why it so important that we learn to process our thoughts, to discern where they are coming from and to wisely choose which thoughts to entertain and which to reject.

It's a trick of the Devil (and a very effective and powerful trick these days) to get people to reject godly principles because they want to “be different” or “be themselves.” When people think such thoughts, though, they're not really thinking their *own* thoughts but rather choosing to think thoughts that are inspired by the Evil One. It's not the “free

IS YOUR MIND “FREE”?



thinkers,” in their supposed individuality, who come up with those “original” thoughts; the Devil or one of his imps puts those thoughts there, and people adopt them as their own. So expressing thoughts that contradict the Bible isn't a sign of individuality, but of accepting beliefs from the dark side.

In a sense, believing and conforming to the truth of God's Word *does* make you a slave in your thoughts, but so does believing and conforming to the Devil's lies. We all surrender our thoughts to one side or the other—light or darkness—so everyone chooses, consciously or unconsciously, who will be their master.

The desire to be a distinct individual is inborn, put there by God, and isn't wrong. But there is a right way and a wrong way to go about pursuing individuality. True freedom and godly individuality do *not* come from thinking thoughts that are contrary to God's Word. In fact, it's just the opposite. Jesus said, “If you abide in My Word”—if you believe and follow it—“you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32). □

AT FIRST READING, the book of Revelation is not only mysterious but also confusing. Understanding how the book is structured helps it become clearer. Revelation can be divided into three sections of seven chapters each, with chapter 22 (which is basically a continuation of chapter 21) added to the last section.


The first section begins with an introduction, followed by letters of correction and commendation from the apostle John to seven “churches” of his day—communities of believers (Acts 2:44–47). Then, beginning with chapter 4, John relates his experience of being taken to God’s throne room in Heaven, where he witnesses Jesus opening a mysterious scroll that is sealed with seven seals. As each one is opened, a spiritual entity or an Endtime event is revealed.

In the following seven chapters, the Lord zooms in to give a more detailed look at the coming three-and-a-half years of worldwide trouble known as the “Great Tribulation” (Matthew 24:15–21). Here we learn of the spiritual struggle between good and evil, and of the rise of the Antichrist, who is depicted as “the Beast.” These events culminate in the Second Coming of Jesus and the gathering to Him of all believers.

The last section begins with events on earth immediately after Jesus’ return. The chronological order of events is interrupted by a two-chapter description of “Babylon the Great,” symbolizing the brazen materialism of this day and age, and more information on the Beast. It then returns to the chronological account of future events, beginning with a great celebration in Heaven with Jesus and those He has gathered to Him from earth at the Second Coming of Christ. This is followed by the Battle of Armageddon, where Jesus and His followers defeat the Antichrist, and continues through the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth to the happy ending when the Heavenly City, New Jerusalem, comes down to its eternal resting place on the newly recreated planet Earth and God Himself dwells with the saved (Revelation 21:2–3).

One question nearly everyone has is whether John’s descriptions are literal or symbolic. Undoubtedly there are some of each. Another thing to bear in mind is that he was seeing in a vision things he had never seen before—things of *our* day—so he had to describe them in the terms of his own experience and in language that the people of his day could understand. For example, John had never seen tanks or planes or guns or bombs or heard their roar. So if he was watching modern warfare, he might describe tanks as chariots or warplanes flying at then incomprehensible altitudes as locusts.

Many things in the book of Revelation remain mysteries or topics of speculation. As future events unfold, Jesus will help us understand more. □



an
Overview
ENDTIME INSIGHTS
of the



“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John” (Revelation 1:1).

What » The Revelation of Jesus Christ—“things which must shortly take place.”

Who » The divine author was God Himself, who gave the vision to Jesus Christ “to show His servants.”

How » Jesus relayed the vision through a heavenly messenger to the apostle John—also known as John the Beloved, one of Jesus’ original 12 disciples and the author of the Gospel of John—who wrote it down and sent it to the Christians (referred to collectively in the book of Revelation as churches) in seven cities in the region that roughly corresponds with modern-day Turkey.

Where » John received the vision on the Isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, where he had been banished during the persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Domitian “for [spreading] the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:9). It is believed that about a year after receiving the vision, John was released and permitted to return to Ephesus (in modern-day Turkey).

When » It is believed that John received this vision in 95 AD and wrote it down the following year, in 96 AD.

Why » Ultimately so that we who are living today would understand the events of the Endtime as they unfold. “You, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day [Jesus’ return] should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:4).

THE BOTTOM LINE The forces of evil will never be able to completely overcome God’s people. In spite of all the wrath and atrocities that bestial man will bring against God’s children during the Great Tribulation—the coming three-and-a-half-year worldwide reign of terror against people of all faiths by the devilish dictatorship of the Antichrist and his regime—multitudes of us Christians will still be here to joyously welcome Christ’s triumphant re-entry into the earth’s atmosphere (Matthew 24:21, 29–31). Jesus is the only One who can stop us, and He will stop us then for a little while to take us home for a party, the marriage supper of the Lamb in Heaven! Then we’ll come back here and put a stop to the reign of the wicked! (Revelation chapter 19).
D.B.B.

Book of Revelation



WHY You're in God's hands! WORRY?

GOD LOVES YOU! He is your kind and loving heavenly Father who personally loves you, His own dear child, and you are in His hands. He has made this beautiful world as a home for you to live in and enjoy, and He has lovingly given you a wonderful body, mind, and heart with which to enjoy it.

Sad to say, some people have gotten the idea that God is some kind of monster who follows them around with a big stick, always ready to clobber them! But the Bible says that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). He is loving and forgiving, and the only reason He follows anyone around is in hopes that they will turn around to meet Him, so He can receive them in His open arms!

Others say they don't believe in God because they can't understand Him. Well, no one can ever really understand God. It's impossible! He says, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9). But even though we don't really understand Him, we can look at the beautiful world He has made—the trees, the flowers, the mountains, the sea, the sky—and feel His love in His wonderful creation.

You don't have to understand God in order to love Him, any more than a little baby needs to understand everything about his mother and father in order to know their love. This is why Jesus said that you have to be like a little child to enter the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:3). There are certain things that you just have to accept by faith.

Jesus also said that “God is a Spirit” (John 4:24). He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere-present. Even the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him (1 Kings 8:27). He is not confined to Earth or our solar system or the Milky Way galaxy or even the entire universe. He is all and in all—far beyond the limited mind of man and our human understanding!

But because He loves us and wanted to show us His love, He sent His own Son in the form of a man, Jesus Christ. Jesus was like a picture of God, “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), to show us what God is like—and all He did was love. He talked about love and showed love and lived love, and finally, in love, laid down His life for us, to bring life, forgiveness, and eternal joy to all who would receive Him.

So if you feel that God is far from you, maybe it's because you haven't received His love. There is an empty place, which God created in each of our hearts, that only He can fill. Nothing else can truly satisfy. If

you would like for Him to fill that empty spot in you, all you have to do is open your heart to Him. He will give you His love that will change your whole outlook on life.

This is one of the wonderful things about God's love: When we know that God loves us, we know that everything in our lives is going to work out in the end because He will take care of us. This is faith, and it's faith in His love that keeps out worry and fear. "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Receiving God's love into your heart is like turning on a light in a dark room—the darkness has to flee!

Then you won't need to worry anymore. You'll know your heavenly Father loves you and that you and yours—your future, your health, your family—are in His hands. "Do not worry about your life. Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:25–26). He will care for His own!

Do you have God's love in your heart? If not, all you have to do is pray and ask Jesus to come into your life! He says, "Behold, I stand at the door [of your heart] and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in" (Revelation 3:20). He loves you and will come in right now if you will sincerely pray this prayer:

Jesus, please forgive me for all my sins. I believe that You are the Son of God and that You died for me. I now open the door of my heart and I ask You to come in and give me Your gift of eternal life. Then help me to love You and to love others with Your love. Amen. □

Receiving God's love into your heart is like turning on a light in a dark room

FEEDING READING CARNAL REASONING

When the terms "carnal mind," "carnal-mindedness," "carnal thinking," or "carnal reasoning" are used in the Bible, the intended meaning of "carnal" is not the most common modern meaning of "sensual or sexual," but "of the flesh" as opposed to "of the spirit."

Secret of success: Jeremiah 8:9
Trust the Lord for His leading and guidance. Romans 1:21–22
Romans 8:6–8
2 Chronicles 26:5
1 Corinthians 3:18–20
Psalm 37:23
1 Corinthians 8:1b–3
Psalm 118:8
Proverbs 3:5–7
Isaiah 48:17

We cannot find our way through life without the Lord's direct guidance. Proverbs 16:2
Ecclesiastes 2:26a
Isaiah 42:16
Isaiah 55:8–9
Jeremiah 10:23
Proverbs 16:9
John 15:5

If we depend on carnal reasoning, we're doomed to disappointment and final failure. Proverbs 16:2
Psalm 37:31
Psalm 119:105
Psalm 119:130
Proverbs 6:22–23
2 Peter 1:19
Isaiah 42:16
Isaiah 55:8–9

Carnal reasoning is foolish and displeasing to God. Proverbs 16:3
Isaiah 30:21
Jeremiah 33:3
James 1:5
Isaiah 47:10

God's Word shows us the way by shedding light on the subject.

Proverbs 16:2
Ecclesiastes 2:26a
Isaiah 42:16
Isaiah 55:8–9

God has all the answers and delights to give them to us, so pray.

Proverbs 16:3
Isaiah 30:21
Jeremiah 33:3
James 1:5

WHAT IS TRUE AND RIGHT?

You can ask Me for any of the gifts of My Spirit, and according to My will I'll give them to you.

Solomon, when he was first made king, was desperate for My wisdom because he knew that he needed it. He prayed sincerely, wholeheartedly, and unselfishly, "Give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (1 Kings 3:9). Because his heart was in the right place, I really poured it on. As long as he stayed close to Me, he was one of the wisest men who had ever lived.

Wisdom is a great gift to have, because it's the gift of understanding what's true and right—and in today's mixed-up world, that can sometimes be hard to know. If you were to go only by what you read or hear, you'd be completely lost—you'd have no idea what the truth is or what's really happening around you. But with My gift of wisdom, you can know exactly where things truly stand.

Another gift that would be a big help to you is the gift of discernment. It's very similar to wisdom in that it helps you to have greater insight into people and situations, and to be able to tell whether they're being true or false.

Having these two gifts is a lot better than just being smart or well educated. If you want to be wise and have good discernment, just ask Me. Sincerely pray for these gifts of My Spirit, and I'll give them to you.