

BEYOND TODAY

The British & European Supplement

November/December 2017

Even kings and princes cannot sidestep sorrow

Present-day princes, just like ancient kings, face the same challenges from loss or bereavement as everyone else. The Bible gives guidance on how to handle sorrows and move on with our lives.

Twenty years have passed since the death of Diana, Princess of Wales on 31 August 1997. Such was its emotional impact that many still remember the visual images and news stories as if it were yesterday. The outpouring of grief from the British public and all around the world was unparalleled and in stark contrast to the accepted portrayal of the British with their stiff upper lip, out of touch with their emotions.

What it has been like for Princes William and Harry, who were 15 and 12 years old respectively at the time of their mother's death, to grow up after such a harrowing and public loss, has only come to light over the past three years.

Unsatisfactory coping strategies

During an interview with Bryony Gordon in April 2017 (podcast with Prince Harry at www.bryonymsad-world.telegraph.co.uk/), the prince explained that he had learned to shut down his emotions whenever he thought about his mother and felt sad. However, not talking about his thoughts and feelings took its toll. Harry began boxing to alleviate a build-up of aggression. He experienced internal chaos, anxiety and panic at public engagements and described how, on numerous occasions, he felt close to a complete breakdown.

With encouragement from his brother William and others, Harry sought professional help. Once he began



Prince Harry's admission of struggling with grief has helped others dealing with similar feelings of loss.

Shutterstock

talking about it he poured out all the grief that had been unresolved for almost two decades and it quickly became apparent that he was not alone in repressing grief.

Carrying on with life as if nothing has happened after a traumatic event is a form of denial. We may think we are getting away with it. There is, however, often a price to pay. Even those among royalty, both past and present, have learned through sad experience that ignoring, denying or attempting to dampen emotional pain simply doesn't work.

Americans and British alike are increasingly using drugs and alcohol to attempt to anaesthetise emotional pain. The opioid epidemic in America is resulting in tens of thousands of deaths a year from prescription drug overdoses and was declared a national emergency on 11 August this year by President Donald Trump (www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/08/11/trump-declares-opioid-epidemic-national-emergency-here-s-what-that-means.html).

There has to be a better way to deal with sorrow, whether it be from loss, bereavement or any other cause.

A strange scripture

Some people may be surprised to learn that the Bible has much to say about such issues. King Solomon, humbly speaking the wisest man who ever lived, wrote numerous proverbs and guidance for living. In his old age Solomon wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes – wisdom he had gleaned from life's lessons. He thought his wealth, learning and fame would bring happiness but they did not satisfy him. He began his reign in obedience to God but his love for his pagan wives led him to build temples to the false gods of those wives. He thereby made some incredibly poor decisions. At the end of his book he states: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Among these wise sayings, he wrote, "Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better" (Ecclesiastes 7:3). At first glance this saying seems bizarre. How can sorrow be better than laughter? How can sadness possibly benefit the heart? On the surface these observations sound quite preposterous! How can we possibly make sense of Solomon's advice?

Dealing with negative emotions

Ephesians 4:26-27 provides a wealth of information on dealing with negative emotions. Paul tells us that it is possible to experience a negative emotion such as anger without sinning. However, we are to deal with it on the same day if possible. Psychologists recognise that if we suppress anger this can give rise to resentment, grudges, bitterness, separation, depression, passive aggressive behaviours, etc. What was an emotional upset has now become a spiritual problem. However, this rationale does not apply to all negative emotions.

When a person loses a loved one through death it is natural to go through a grieving process. That cannot be dealt with in just one day. It usually takes many months or years. At first the bereaved may experience denial, being unable to accept that their loved one is no longer living. Then after denial often comes anger. The person might be angry at God for not healing the individual, or the medical doctors for a wrong diagnosis, or him or herself for failing to recognise the seriousness of the situation or simply not having done enough. Gradually this changes to deep sadness when the reality of the loss and the absence becomes pronounced. Later the person comes to a point of acceptance. This process takes time.

A way out of depression

At the beginning of Psalm 32, King David appears to be quite depressed and probably feeling guilty as a result of having committed adultery with Bathsheba and then deliberately arranging for her husband Uria to be killed in battle: "When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer" (Psalm 32:3-4).

Solomon's sage advice backed by medical science

Among King Solomon's proverbs is another that relates directly to health and well-being. The accuracy of this advice has been confirmed by medical science. He wrote, "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Proverbs 17:22).

Science has discovered at least six different ways that laughter activates the immune system, including increasing the number and activity level of natural killer cells that attack cells infected by viruses and some types of cancers, and increasing the activation of T cells (T lymphocytes).

The second half of the proverb, describes the detrimental effects of unresolved negative emotions on the bones. How could that be? The bone marrow is where two major components of the immune system the T cells and B cells – are produced.

Perhaps science will someday discover that distress shuts down the ability of the bone marrow to function optimally.

Dealing with negative emotions as advocated in Ecclesiastes 7:3 can have a positive effect on the immune system in just the same way that laughter has beneficial effects on it.

Not dealing appropriately with the negative emotions was making David very miserable. Then in verse 5 we see a resolution for this problem: “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’ and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.”

The way David overcame his depressed state was to talk to God about the situation. In this case, he needed to confess his sin and his guilt, then to ask for forgiveness. We see the result – a shift to strong positive emotions – described both at the beginning and the end of the psalm: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit . . . Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous; and shout

Going to God for help and confessing our deepest grief or anger can start the healing process.

for joy, all you upright in heart!” (verses 1, 2 and 11).

This is a beautiful illustration of the reality of Ecclesiastes 7:3. David had to experience the negative emotions as he talked to God about the situation before he could once again be experiencing joy in his life. We can choose to deal with our past traumas, anger and emotional hurts in the same manner. Going to God for help and confessing our deepest grief or anger can start the healing process.

Practical applications

So how can we work through our past traumas or present distress? We must have a willingness to accept that what has happened cannot be changed in this life and have a desire to move on. Living in the past often destroys any hope of present or future happiness. It is not easy to choose this option, nor is the process easy, but neither is staying in what is effectively a “bad place.” This does not mean that one cannot take appropriate legal action should the situation merit it, but this should be done without a desire for revenge or getting back at any perpetrator.

For a positive outcome we can:

1) Discuss the matter with God on a regular basis. Confess if necessary and ask for forgiveness for any wrong thoughts or attitudes, for lack of faith, patience and the like. In the case of bereavement, both the Father and Christ know the effects of death.

2) Talk to close friends, family members or the ministry. Have a phone-buddy or someone you can contact when times get really tough. Try to balance your need to talk with their need to live their own lives.

3) Read the Psalms for encouragement. Even spiritual giants such as King David had their struggles.

4) If it is too difficult to talk to someone else, there is a simple, well-researched method shown to be very effective. Termed the Pennebaker Method, one writes about one’s deepest thoughts and feelings about a situation for 20 minutes four days in a row. This brings to the surface the negative emotions that have been suppressed, often to our harm. This will help us with point one above. After four or five days a person is usually at a point of acceptance.

While a first reading of Ecclesiastes 7:3 may seem surprising, there is good science to back it up and we see that the principles are illustrated elsewhere in the Bible. It takes willingness to apply the methods briefly outlined above and it is unlikely to be an easy journey.

King Solomon messed his life up royally but in the Book of Ecclesiastes, his book of wisdom bequeathed to mankind, he left us with the principle that sorrow is better than laughter. It may sound paradoxical, but to have a joyful heart we often need to work through our sadness and emotional hurts!

Twenty years on

Princess Diana talked openly of her struggles with self-esteem, bulimia and her suicide attempts. Many dismissed her as being hysterical, unstable, and attention-seeking. In reality, most people probably felt uncomfortable with hearing someone speaking openly about such matters.

Now, twenty years later, many are ready for those conversations to take place. Prince William and his wife Catherine, together with Prince Harry, have created a “Heads Together” campaign to encourage people to talk about the stressful things going on in their lives to try to prevent or ameliorate future mental health problems. As Bryony Gordon said in her interview with Prince Harry, “No one has ever gotten better from a mental health issue by not talking about it.” Talking to others can and does help, but even more beneficial is discussing the matters with God.

If you have a hard time believing that God could possibly forgive you for some of the things you have done in the past, write for the booklet *Forgiveness is Possible*. For further help on coping with grief (and it is applicable to other losses too) read the chapter “Steps in Dealing With Grief” in our booklet *What Happens After Death?*

Dr Wayne Topping

A revealed way of life that should not be ignored

Today even professing Christians reject many biblical concepts which were once held to be divinely inspired. However, God warns that they do so at their peril.

Salisbury Cathedral is architecturally a splendid ecclesiastical structure built in the early English style during the reign of Henry III (1216 to 1272), the same king who rebuilt Westminster Abbey later in his life. At services, during the cathedral's almost 800-year existence, sermons, hymns and readings had their source in a particular book which began to be collated more than 3,000 years ago. This book is the Bible, held to be divinely inspired by both Jews and Christians.

As the Word of God it gave direction to worshippers, reminding them of their obligations to God and neighbour. That divine directive was first given to the Israelites after the Exodus as stated by Moses: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Unrecorded human traditions versus the "oracles of God"

The apostle Paul affirmed this divine inspiration when he described Scripture as "the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2) and stated, "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is able to make you wise for salvation" (2 Timothy



3:15-16). Both "the oracles of God" and "all Scripture" refer primarily to the Old Testament because Paul and others were still writing letters and epistles that would eventually make up what we now know as the New Testament. It is God's will that the Old and New Testaments are made available to all of mankind. We all need spiritual direction and the Bible provides that direction. God reminds us in Isaiah 51:6-7, "My righteousness will not be abolished . . ."

In sharp contrast, barely 100 yards from the Cathedral, is Salisbury Museum where you can find remains of another ancient civilisation – that of Stonehenge. But this pre-Christian, pre-Hebrew civilisation left no written records, no divinely-inspired legacy of what they were to believe or how they were to live their lives.

The ancient Israelites were directed to record God's revealed knowledge into a book (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). This first portion (the Pentateuch) was considered so important that it was kept in a special place, beside the ark of the covenant. Together with the later books (various writings, histories and prophetic utterances) and the New Testament, these writings form the Bible, God's instruction book for mankind. The Stonehenge dwellers (described as the Beaker People on account of the drinking vessels discovered in their burial mounds) likely had their own religious concepts based on human tradition but no divinely inspired writings.



Top: Salisbury Cathedral; above: Little is known of the people who built Stonehenge and why they built it.

Shutterstock

Biblical knowledge rejected

Some 2,000 years after Stonehenge is believed to have been built the Israelites were commanded to preserve for posterity the revelations from God. The prophet Isaiah, over 2,500 years ago now, prophesied that God's Word would never cease to exist: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever." Throughout history the sacred Scriptures have survived many threats.

Since the enemies of God couldn't destroy His Word outright, they resorted to implying that the Bible was the invention of man rather than inspired by God. Higher German critics of the 19th century tried to show that the Bible was not God's revelation at all. They reasoned, why would God choose a persecuted people, who had been enslaved in Egypt, to preserve His revelation in Old Testament times (Deuteronomy 7:6-7).

In the 21st century evolution has become the god of modern man, with a secular society having no need or desire to have God telling them what to do. If we are the product of evolutionary forces, they think, there is no

God revealing to us a way of life that would be pleasing to Him. If there is no Creator, then human beings were not created in the image of God. The Bible clearly contradicts this thinking by stating, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27).

Of course, not everyone worships the god of evolution; not everyone believes the Bible is uninspired. The question remains, have followers of God based their lives fully on God's Word?

A personal challenge

Unfortunately, over the centuries many believers have not adhered fully to the authority of the Bible. The watering down of biblical teachings began almost 2,000 years ago. Once the original apostles had died, men who treasured their own traditions more than the authority of the Bible began to take centre stage. Jesus had warned the religious leaders in Jerusalem and elsewhere of the danger of following the traditions of men rather than the Word of God (Mark 7:5-13).

Know the Book: Prove the Book

How can anyone live by every word of God as Christ instructed if he or she never reads the Bible?

It would be considered very strange if car drivers were allowed out onto the congested British road network without any knowledge of the Highway Code, or if a heart surgeon were permitted to operate without having studied his or her specialty. Yet for some reason similar standards do not seem to be expected of those who claim to know and follow and even teach about Christ.

An article in *The Daily Telegraph* dated Friday 15th September stated that 60 per cent of the professed followers of the Church of England never read the Bible (www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/09/14/church-england-christians-never-read-bible-survey-finds/). Other denominations may fare better or worse but one would presume that professing Christians, that is those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, would regularly read the very book that explains who He is, what He said and did, and what He expects of those who claim to follow or represent Him.

To truly follow Jesus one would need to know what He requires of His followers. Jesus himself said that to be His friend one had to do what He commanded (John 15:14). He also said that man should not live by bread

alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Luke 4:4). The Holy Bible contains the inspired words of God. The Apostle Paul plainly stated that the scriptures are profitable for instruction in righteousness, and he strongly implied that without them there would be no salvation (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

So, why don't professing Christians read the Bible?

We live in a time-pressured materialistic society in which people get very little time to rest or to consider the deep issues of life. Hours can also be wasted on various distractions designed to keep our minds from the Divine. Society in general is becoming very anti-God and anti-Christian, with a great deal of propaganda attempting to show that the Bible is merely a collection of incomprehensible writings with no relevance to the modern world, composed by long-dead men.

If readers wish to learn how erroneous these ideas are they are invited to write for or download our booklets *Is the Bible True?* and *You Can Understand the Bible*.

Once the Book is read, and especially read for what it actually teaches, godly principles can be inculcated into our everyday lives, enhancing our walk with God.

Philip Perry

As the centuries rolled by “Christian” leaders began embracing counterfeit days and festivals, notably Christmas (celebrated by the pre-Christian Romans on December 25th) and Easter, named after the Germanic goddess of Spring, Ostara. The immortality of the soul was “borrowed” from Egypt and Greece, and by the fourth century God’s all-pervasive Holy Spirit had been redefined as a third person in a Trinity, itself a concept of pagan origin. (For more information on these topics please request or download our booklets *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*, *Why Were You Born?* and *Is God a Trinity?*)

Europe has recently celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation initiated by Martin Luther, where religious leaders ‘picked and chose’ what they decided was relevant in God’s Word. The majority of Christians today have rejected biblical teachings that have withstood the passage of time and have substituted human traditions of little value for those truths.

Every one of us needs to ask, do I accept what appeals to me and reject what I don’t like, or do I genuinely desire the Bible to be my authoritative guide to life?

Gerhard Marx

A glimpse into eternity

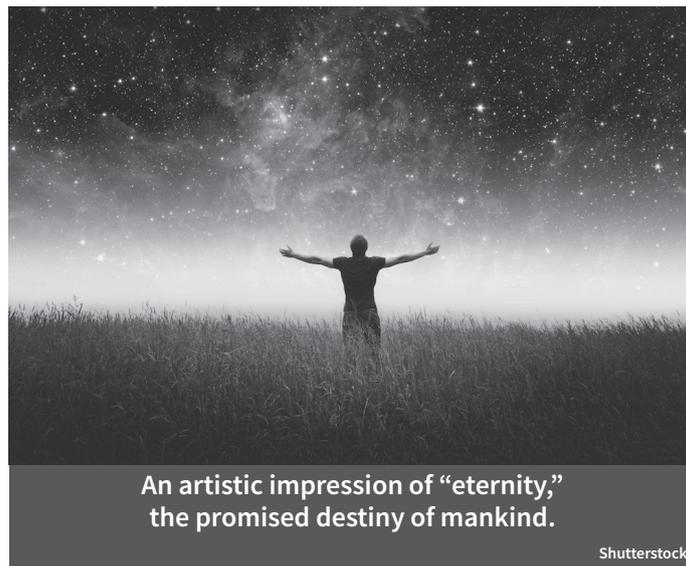
As winter descends on the northern hemisphere, there may be opportunities to view stars and planets that are less visible in the short, light nights of summer. What can they teach us about our future?

Weather conditions and street lighting permitting, clear, crisp winter nights can afford a breathtaking view of the heavens. Familiar constellations at this time of year include Orion the hunter, Leo the lion, and the ubiquitous Plough.

King David, who spent his youth watching over his family’s sheep by day and by night, would have been familiar with the procession of heavenly bodies crossing the sky throughout the year in his part of

the world. Being closer to the equator, he would not have experienced the huge seasonal differentials between sunrise and sunset that we do in higher latitudes.

In awe of what he saw, David wrote, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned them with glory and honour. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas” (Psalm 8:3-8).



An artistic impression of “eternity,” the promised destiny of mankind.

Shutterstock

Another psalmist wrote of God, “He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name” (Psalm 147:4). This is an amazing statement. From the British Isles, at best we can see around 5,000 different stars with our own eyes during the course of a year. Binoculars and telescopes add to that number, but beyond our galaxy are others containing vast numbers of celestial lights.

The writer of Hebrews reiterates the words of King David and adds an intriguing twist to them. “But one

testified in a certain place, saying: ‘What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honour, and set him over the works of your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.’ For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him” (Hebrews 2:5-8).

Since man already has dominion over the earth, the “all things” that are not yet put under him must be the heavens.

How humankind will be able to fulfil this amazing destiny is explained in more detail in our booklet *Why Were You Born?*



through the laying on of hands, God's Spirit gradually helps us to take on Christ's character. It will never control us. To learn more about about baptism and the receipt of the Holy Spirit, also request our booklets *Tools For Spiritual Growth* and *The Power of the Holy Spirit*.

Q What is the significance of the Ark of the Covenant?

Reader from Teddington

A The Ark of the Covenant housed the Ten Commandments, "written with the finger of God" on two tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18 and 32:16). The commandments provide the basics of how we should live before God (the first four) and fellow man (the last six).

Not only did the Ark's contents give the ancient Israelites direction on how to live, but it also represented God's mercy when they fell short of keeping those laws. The Ark had a golden top which was called the "mercy seat," showing that God is merciful and compassionate to those who are willing to live by His standards.

Originally the Ark was placed in the most holy part of the Tabernacle. After King Solomon built the Temple, it found its resting place in the most holy part of that building. When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century BC, the Ark was either destroyed, dismantled, hidden or lost.

God still expects us to keep His commandments, now to be written on our hearts (Hebrews 8:7-12). When Christ lived on earth, He magnified the Ten Commandments and explained their spiritual intent (Matthew 5:17-30). God still forgives us when we fall short and repent, not this time through animal blood sprinkled on the mercy seat but through the blood of Christ, which He took into heaven itself (Hebrews 9:11-14).

At one time the Ark also contained Aaron's rod and a pot of manna (Hebrews 9:4) but by the time of Solomon's temple it seems only the two stone tablets remained (1 Kings 8:9).

Q What is the Book of Life? Whose names are written in it and why?

FAQ

A In the present age, those called by God and faithful to Him have their names written in this book (Exodus 32:31-33, Daniel 12:1). Whether it is a literal or metaphorical "book" isn't clear. These will be in the first resurrection (Revelation 3:5; 20:6).

In the second resurrection all who have ever lived but did not know or understand God will be brought back to physical life. The Book of Life is opened again and more names added as these people are taught from Scripture and judged by their response (Revelation 20:11-15).

Q What can a person do in order to walk in accordance with God's will?

Reader from St Helens

A Jesus came to call people to repentance and to accept Him as his or her personal Saviour – He died that we might live. That message is still going out today – repent and be baptised. This is an important step and should not be taken lightly. As Jesus said, a person needs to "count the cost" (Luke 14:28). This takes time.

Firstly, we can ask God to open our minds to understand His Word and our part in His plan of salvation. In today's religious confusion, where the traditions of men are assumed to be the truths of God, the best way to learn what the Bible has to say is to study it without any preconceived ideas. Our 12-lesson *Bible Study Course* can help give an overview of the themes of the Bible.

Next, one needs to apply in daily life the principles learned from Scripture. Our booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Transforming Your Life* can show you how.

The Holy Spirit is essential for spiritual growth. God uses it to guide us from the very moment of our calling, leading us to repentance and baptism. Then indwelling,

Let the Bible Answer...

What does the Bible say about pride?

God's view of pride is found in Proverbs 6:16-19; 8:12-14; 16:5; Isaiah 13:11.

Warnings against self-promotion are in Proverbs 25:6-7 (reiterated by Christ in Luke 14:10) and Proverbs 27:2, and against thinking too highly of oneself in Proverbs 3:7; Romans 12:3 and Philippians 2:1-11.

The folly of pride is mentioned in Proverbs 11:2; 16:18 and 29:23, and Romans 12:16.



Letters From Our Readers

Subscribers renew

Thank you for the literature you send me. Your magazines and booklets have answered many questions for me. I would like to continue to subscribe.

Reader from Leeds

I value your magazine very highly and each copy is seen by friends and relatives. I would like to renew my subscription and to receive your magazine for a further year. God bless your valuable work.

Reader from Portsmouth

Beyond Today opens up the Bible and reignites faith

Please find enclosed a donation towards your work. I am finding the scripture study very enlightening and am reading the Bible right the way through. I have reached Solomon's story in the book of Kings.

Reader from Torpoint

Thank you so much for your informative and easy to understand information on God's plan for my future. I really appreciate all the booklets.

Reader from Plymouth

I cannot express how much I look

forward to receiving this publication, as it opens up the Bible for me in a way my private study and even my church's weekly Bible studies fail to do.

Reader from Peterborough

Thank you for your offer of the Bible Study Guide on *Angels*. I have found the *Beyond Today* magazines an inspiration to reignite my faith in Jesus. Over the years I have become far too comfortable in my faith. I look forward to receiving this new booklet.

Reader from Scotland

Reading these magazines enlightens me more and more and gives me confidence in belief in Christ as my Saviour.

Reader from Hull

Accessible resources

May God bless you so much. I am a prisoner who draws strength and wisdom from your work. I wish I had money to donate to you. What I do have is my pen, so with it I write thanking you and pleading with you to keep up the good work.

Name and address supplied

Since subscribing to your magazine and newsletters I have found

them interesting and enlightening. It is also very humbling to know these resources are easily accessible and available free of charge.

Reader from Stockport

Prayer Requests

Could you please pray for my children to know God more and fear to do evil and for miracles to happen in their lives.

Name and address supplied

Editor's comment: We are often asked to pray for different situations in subscribers' lives. We can and do pray that God's plans and purposes will be fulfilled for everyone and for His kingdom to come soon. However, our personal desires may not be His will at this time (Mark 14:32-36).

Readers seeking a more meaningful walk with God, including a more effective prayer life may find our booklet Tools For Spiritual Growth helpful.

To develop deeper trust that our Father in heaven knows what is best for us and our loved ones, please also request You Can Have Living Faith.

Our literature can be downloaded from our website, www.ucg.org or requested from the address at the bottom of the front page.

How our literature is funded

The publication of this Supplement and other literature is funded by the generosity of members of the Church, co-workers and our readers. Following Jesus Christ's instruction in Matthew 10:8, it is supplied free of charge so that His message can be made available to all. We are grateful to those who assist financially in the work done by the United Church of God.

Donations may be sent to *Beyond Today* or United Church of God, PO Box 705, Watford WD19 6FZ, United Kingdom; or donated through your bank (ask us for our bank details), or online at www.ucg.org.uk/donate.html through Paypal or Charity Choice.

The United Church of God – British Isles is registered as a charity in England and Wales (number 1079192).