

# BEYOND TODAY

The British & European Supplement

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## Why God created human beings capable of sin

*Opinions vary as to why an all-loving God would create humankind, knowing that sin would almost certainly ensnare that creation. Here's what we learn from God's word.*

God did not create human beings as automatons. Instead, He created them with free will and the option either to choose to follow His instructions or to go their own way. It is that freedom of choice that allowed the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, to disobey their Maker in the Garden of Eden. Their choice allowed sin to enter the world, and death came to all, because everyone sins (Romans 5:12).

Yet, when God created the earth as we know it, He declared everything to be “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Included in this “very good” were Adam and Eve themselves (verses 26-30). The Almighty's plan for His human creation entails permitting an inherently disobedient populace to continue along its own path for an allotted time.

That plan is referred to by the apostle Paul when writing under divine inspiration: “For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Referring to something even more glorious and purposeful than the physical creation of man, Paul goes on to explain: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (verses 20-21).

The “bondage” Paul refers to is our tendency to sin

when we allow our human nature to get the better of us. In God's plan for His creation the children of men can become the children of God, thus escaping the “bondage of corruption” that Paul mentions above.

The apostle Paul isn't saying that human nature is evil, although it does all too often lead to evil actions. He is highlighting that human nature is shackled by a tendency towards sin. Human beings are, however, also able to do good.

### A requirement to choose

God wants us, with our own free will, to choose to do what is right and good, rejecting evil. Moses was inspired to tell the Israelites of the Exodus, “I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life,

***God didn't create man as an automaton, but with free will to choose right from wrong.***

that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). That call wasn't generally heeded at the time of Moses nor is it heeded in today's world.

The King James Bible defines sin as “the transgression of [God's] law” (1 John 3:4). The New King James Version translates it as “sin is lawlessness.” To please God it is

essential to keep His commandments. Loving God and keeping His commandments combine to enhance our relationship with God and our fellow human beings (1 John 5:2).

### **Our death sentence paid by Christ**

Human nature became a combination of good and evil, and as such can be manipulated by the evil intent of others, particularly Satan. The apostle Paul confirms that sin is universal, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

God is just and sin incurs a penalty. Paul explains: “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). So every time we sin we bring a death sentence upon ourselves. That penalty must be paid. The verse continues, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. His life served as a ransom for us, wiping our sinful slate clean.

When a person genuinely repents, turns from sin and seeks to obey God, Christ allows His shed blood to cover what should be our death sentence. Our sentence of death is figuratively nailed to His cross (Colossians 2:14). (To study this important subject further please request or download our booklet *Forgiveness Is Possible*.)

Jesus Christ became the High Priest of all who have repented of their sins and acknowledge Him as Lord and Saviour. God Almighty is merciful and full of compassion. He desires that we embrace His way of righteousness, and thus any future sins we commit, when repented of, will be covered by Christ’s supreme sacrifice.

The more that people live by God’s Word, including His laws, the more they learn to shun evil and do good. But it’s a struggle since “the old man” – the former person

with his or her selfish desires – needs to be transformed into “the new man” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

### **The missing dimension**

Human beings must be transformed spiritually, but overcoming our human nature is impossible without divine help. This is where baptism comes in. The repentant sinner is fully immersed in water to symbolise the death of the sinful self. Then God gifts a portion of His Holy Spirit as a “pledge,” or “foretaste” of a future change to immortality (Ephesians 1:13-14, Amplified Bible; 1 Corinthians 15:49-54). This gift comes through prayer and the laying on of hands by the minister (1 Timothy 4:14).

At this point God’s Spirit joins with our human spirit and a spirit life begins. In other words, the physical creation starts to be moulded into a spiritual creation. The laws of God play an essential part in making us aware of sin, so we know what we need to avoid (Romans 3:20).

God’s Spirit in us helps us develop the very character of our Heavenly Father. We become “partakers of the divine nature” as the apostle Peter puts it (2 Peter 1:4). Having God’s Holy Spirit doesn’t mean we don’t sin. What it should mean is that we no longer practise a life of sin. Instead we learn to choose to obey God and reject evil. In this we begin to take on the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5).

God’s plan of salvation entails transforming the life of every human being who is willing to accept what God offers and to turn from a purely selfish way of life to one pleasing to God. Ultimately, such a transformation will result in being born into God’s family.

You may wish to read our booklet *Why Were You Born?* which goes into additional detail.

*Gerhard Marx*

## **Frequently asked question:**

# ***Will you please pray for . . . ?***

**D**uring the Covid-19 pandemic we have understandably received many requests to pray for various situations, especially for healing, for protection, for job security and even for the virus to go away.

We do pray in general that God will intervene in the lives of all our *Beyond Today* readers. We pray also for Christ’s intervention in this world. Only His return will solve all its ills.

God has a plan for everyone and is seeking a personal relationship with those He is calling in this age, and later with everyone who has ever lived. Prayer is a conversation with God and builds closer contact with our Heavenly

Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin severs that relationship, as the prophet Isaiah wrote: “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

For help in building a vibrant prayer life and assurance that God hears the prayers of those truly seeking Him, please request or download our study guide *Tools for Spiritual Growth*.

We thank all of those who are praying for this work.

*Editor*

# Tongue control matters

*There is no marriage, family or friendship that isn't made either stronger or weaker by how we choose and use the words emanating from our mouths or our keypads.*

**C**ontrolling what we say each time we open our mouths is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of Christian living. Without doubt, the tongue is the most difficult part of our body to rule.

Have you ever uttered something and realised immediately that you didn't mean to say it, you've just blurted it out without thinking? It is a common ailment, especially when you are speaking to those you think you know well. I suffer from it continually. This embarrassing ailment is colloquially called "foot-in-mouth" disease, and often happens to me when I engage my tongue ahead of my brain.

We can call this the "ready, fire, aim" mentality.

## Effects of thoughtless speech

We live in an age of fast communication where everyone is striving to get their point across. This is especially true in the world of social media and is fraught with danger. A famous individual tweets or posts online without thinking and causes great offence. The average person is not exempt from displaying misguided expressions of annoyance and, although the repercussions may not be so widespread, they can be equally devastating. Apologies rarely undo the damage and many pay with their job, fan-base or personal relationships.

If we blurt out the first thing on our minds, many mistakes and offences will abound. However, if we carefully think the matter through before speaking or typing, then our words will tend to be more measured.

Too many incidents manifest themselves nowadays where individuals do or say things without thinking and

before you know it the whole episode has been recorded on a mobile phone and disseminated around the world.

It is interesting to compare this modern phenomenon with King Solomon's message in the book of Ecclesiastes: "Do not curse the king, even in your thought; do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice, and a bird in flight may tell the matter" (Ecclesiastes 10: 20). This may well be the origin of our saying "a little bird told me."

We read in the book of James what he considers the root cause of these issues, warning us to be careful what we say, likening incautious words to a raging forest fire (James 3:5-6). He continues, "For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude [likeness] of God" (verses 7-9). This is not how Christ's disciples should behave.

## Taming the untameable

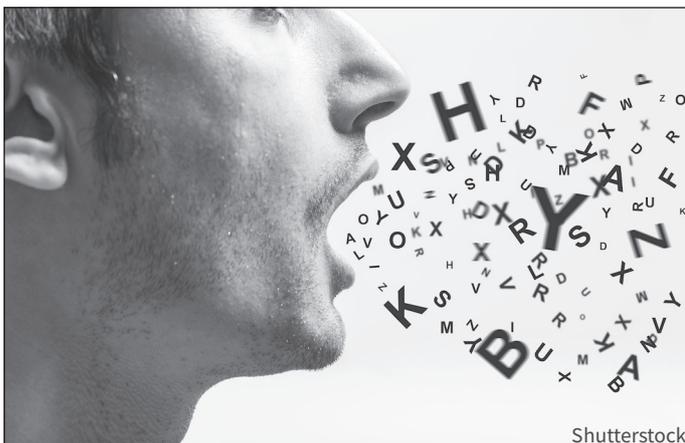
Imagine how much more the news and entertainment media, politics and our social lives could be enhanced and improved were we to first think things through as the apostle James indicates.

Before speaking, we should ask ourselves: Does this need to be said, or do I just want to say it? Would more harm transpire by saying it or not? If it needs to be said, am I sharing it with the right person or persons?

Try using the following simple formula. If what you were going to say doesn't pass this acrostic test, don't say it.

- T – Is it truthful?
- H – Is it helpful?
- I – Is it inspiring?
- N – Is it necessary?
- K – Is it kind?

Pray for wisdom to resist being pulled into negative conversations. The biblical King David wrote, "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3). If an individual ap-



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proaches you and begins speaking negatively about another, ask yourself: “Is this something I need to hear?”

To gauge innermost thoughts and attitudes, try listening to the words you utter. What comes out of our mouths is such an important concept to God, because it reflects who we really are. Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34).

The words that flow from our mouths betray the true inclinations of mind and heart. The author of Hebrews

explains: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

Let us make it our goal to recognise not just what’s coming out of our mouths but what lies deep inside and ask God to help us reflect His love and kindness.

*Mark Webb*

# Tips to boost patience

*An essential virtue in times of trial such as that facing the world now, patience is sorely lacking in society. A careful analysis of our own actions may reveal it is also lacking in us.*

**B**eing locked down for weeks has brought out the best and the worst in people. Some have volunteered their time to help others who due to age and ill health have been shut in their homes. Conversely some have shown extreme impatience and even selfishness. How well have we reacted to travel restrictions and social distancing? Were we among those who fought over toilet rolls or flour in the local supermarket?

Beyond the recent restrictions, we might become frustrated that a serious health issue will not go away. Or maybe it is family member who is of concern and you are drained from watching them suffer. It could even be that we just wish the Kingdom of God were here already so all the world’s ills would be solved.

We live in an “instant” society. Take illness as an example. We want the pain to go away and we want it gone now. Even in the midst of this pandemic, impatience has led to ill-conceived promises, words and actions by politicians, scientific and medical advisors and others.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* online defines patience as “the ability to wait, or to continue doing something despite difficulties, or to suffer without complaining or becoming annoyed.” When we analyse ourselves against this definition, how do we measure up?

## Challenges of impatience

Lack of patience may occur only in some areas of our lives. In my work, I can sit for hours happily tracing through hundreds of electrical wires to find a fault. However, I am not so patient when it comes to enduring pain.

Is there anything wrong with being impatient? To

find the answer to this question we need only to look at its results. When considering examples of impatience, road rage may come to mind. Perhaps, whilst sitting in traffic, the light goes green but the guy ahead doesn’t see it because he is looking at his phone. You could potentially become irritated and start honking the horn in frustration. Imagine an ensuing reaction resulting in this individual placing his foot on the brake pedal and remaining stationary. Even worse, he could get out of his vehicle with a steel bar and approach your car.

A 2017 survey by *Autocar* suggests that 80.4% of all motorists have been a victim of some form of road rage and that it is a factor in approximately 33% of all road traffic accidents here in the UK.

## A biblical example of impatience

World history since Creation shows the disastrous effects of impatience.

Satan is very cunning and looks for our vulnerable areas. When God placed Adam and Eve into the Garden of Eden, He instructed them not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Such an action, God told them, would ultimately lead to death (Genesis 2:9, 16-17).

The devil knew this and persuaded Eve that not only had God lied to them about becoming subject to death should they eat from that tree, but that He was keeping wisdom from them. Here was a quick and effortless way of acquiring it. One main reason given as to why Eve ate from the tree was that it was “desirable to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6).

Satan knows if he can persuade us to be impatient

with God or doubt Him because things are not happening in the time frame we expect, he can potentially bring us to the point where we will reject God. Eve was not the only casualty of this deception; Adam was also sucked in and their descendants followed their lead. That is the nature of sin.

### **Understand and counteract the triggers**

So how can we become more patient? Firstly, when we are tempted to become impatient, we could seek to understand the triggers, and then make a conscious decision to counteract it.

Maybe someone is driving really slowly in front of us and holding us up. We then have a choice. We can get irritated with the person leading to a little road rage episode, or we can seek to understand why we are getting impatient, think about the possible consequences and then counteract the trigger by calming down. Try putting ourselves in the other individual's shoes. Perhaps the vehicle has developed a fault. Perhaps a serious accident at some time in the past has resulted in cautious driving.

The point is, people usually don't drive slowly just to upset others. Perhaps we can start to have some empathy for them rather than wanting to run them off the road.

We can apply this approach to almost any instance where we become impatient with others.

### **Seek to understand the big picture**

Another tack is to realise we may only see part of the process. We might have a health issue and it seems God isn't listening to our prayers for healing. We know He can heal us of anything if it suits His plans for us, but we tire of being inconvenienced and grow impatient with Him.

In this instance, and this speaks to one of my own personal trials, I need to stop myself from getting frustrated and looking at it from a short term perspective. Instead I

***When we have confidence that God is in control, it is easier to be patient.***

need to recognise that God has a reason for not intervening at this time. Perhaps He wants me to learn patience!

Years ago, working as a mechanic, I used to get quite impatient with my bosses because of their seemingly inane decisions regarding methods of working. It was only when I went into management that I understood I had seen these decisions strictly from a mechanic's viewpoint.

With a company-wide perspective you see these elements differently – from a sales perspective, safety perspective, logistics perspective and suchlike. Then you can grasp that those decisions actually made sense.

God knows exactly what we each need by way of training, testing and character building over the long term, so He plans our lives in a way that those specifications can be met. When we look at it from this perspective we can grow in patience and faith, confident in the knowledge that God is doing what He needs to for us to become a part of His family.

### **Have a positive outlook**

A third way to boost patience is to view life from a positive perspective. We can then start to see the benefits of patience. Earlier I mentioned that we might wish God's Kingdom were already here. This is definitely something we hope and wait for. However, getting impatient and wishing it were here already implies we think God doesn't know what He is doing, or that He is not in control.

The time will come when God will usher in this new world, but that time is not yet. He is still working to make sure that everyone will have the best opportunity, either now or in a future resurrection, to repent and accept the gift He is offering them (2 Peter 3:9).

It is no mistake that we live in a world that Satan controls, because it allows us to experience the effects of sin first-hand. It is also no mistake that Jesus Christ was crucified for us, since this enables us to see the depths of God's love for every human being on this planet. Looked at from this perspective, we can have confidence that God is in control and it is far easier for us to wait patiently for Christ's return.

### **Ask God for help**

In all areas where our human character is lacking, we can ask God for help. However, patience is a trait that is primarily learned through practice. For some it may be one of the hardest qualities to learn. The apostle James encourages us: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2-3).

Not many people appreciate trials. However, prayerful contact with God as we seek His assistance to better handle difficulties results in many blessings. Such experiences teach us to put our trust in God rather than rely on our own resources. It deepens our relationship with Him and helps us become more patient as we wait to see how God resolves the trials.

*Carl Torcetti*

# How to represent God: Reflect Jesus Christ

*Christians are to be God's representatives. The way we conduct ourselves on a daily basis should showcase His way of living life to the highest standards.*

**M**any companies employ sales representatives, often called “reps.” In addition to selling products one main responsibility is to maintain positive business relationships. The integrity of that rep will be the standard by which business associates judge the company that employs him or her. If the rep fails to conduct him- or herself appropriately, is deficient at dealing with customers' requirements and generally displays poor moral standards, the employer's reputation will suffer.

We are not selling a product, or even trying to convert people – it is God who does the calling. However, as Christians we do represent God and need to reflect our Master's standards. No human has seen God the Father, but we can know how He would behave since Christ modelled that behaviour for us. He explained, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 6:46; 14:9).

## **A perfect example**

We come into contact with people regularly throughout our lives. How do our attitudes and behaviours stack up against the character of Christ? Do we display the attributes of a person led by God? Christ is the standard by which God will measure our progress (Ephesians 4:13).

Others may not agree with our beliefs and practices. But because we are reflecting Christ they should have nothing evil to say against us in respect of our character and integrity (Titus 2:7-8).

Jesus Christ set us a perfect example of how to live God's way of life. He was humble enough to empty Himself of the glory He shared with the Father and come to earth to model it for us and to die for our sins (Philippians 2:5-10). He showed compassion for others, and mixed with people of a lowly position. He fasted and prayed fervently. He always gave the glory to God, submitting to the will of His Father. He taught the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God. He lived a perfect life without sin, the ultimate example to which we should aspire. Finally, He gave that perfect life for us – even forgiving those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34) – so that we might be forgiven of sin and receive eternal life.

After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus sat down

at the right hand of God the Father, interceding for us when we repent, responding to our pleas for mercy when we slip up and helping us as we try to reflect Him in our lives and preach the hope of His soon-coming Kingdom.

## **Attitudes and actions that reflect Christ**

Are the fruits of God's Spirit evident in our daily lives? Do we display an attitude of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)? Are we known for having a gentle and peaceful attitude, showing love and concern for others?

***Our task is to properly represent God in everything we do with an attitude of humility.***

How would our friends and neighbours describe us? Have we shown them consideration during this difficult time? If we were able to do so safely, did we check up on those who were housebound or otherwise confined to their homes? Do friends, relatives and colleagues recognise us as people who strive to do what is right, who tell the truth and don't boast, gossip or use bad language? Do we forgive others? Do we take offence easily? Do we speak before we think?

Our task is to properly represent God in everything we do with an attitude of humility, not seeking to accuse others or exalt ourselves, but seeking to be examples of Christ. As we become totally immersed in God's way of life, and with Christ in us transforming our hearts and minds, we can humbly dedicate our lives to Him.

We are living in difficult times with Covid-19 disrupting our lives. As we come out of lockdown, hopefully we can have a renewed vigour as we set about depicting God's way of life and displaying His character traits. How well are we representing our Heavenly Father? Reflecting Jesus Christ all day and every day is the aim.

*David Riddell*



**Q** Why did Jesus not know the time of His return (Matthew 24:36 and Act 1:7)? Does He know it now?

FAQ

**A** In Matthew 24:36, speaking of the day of His return, Christ stated, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” Again in Acts 1:7 when the disciples asked if He would now take up His rulership of Israel, He told them: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.” There were a couple of customs extant at the time Christ was on earth, which might shed some light on why He said this.

Firstly, in Roman households, sons were not considered full sons and heirs until their father determined it was time for them to pass from childhood to adulthood. This was done in a formal public ceremony, which ended with feasting. The apostle Paul used this example in several places. In his epistle to the Galatians: “Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians

and stewards *until the time appointed by the father*” (Galatians 4:1-2). Note that it was the father who determined when the son received his full rights as a son (See our booklet *Why Were You Born?*, pages 16-17).

Paul explains that we “who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption [sonship], the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23). This “redemption” is our entrance into the Kingdom of God, and occurs at the resurrection at the time of the last trumpet and the return of Christ (Luke 21:27-28; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). So it appears God the Father will choose the timing of the redemption and gathering of His children.

A second thread to this answer concerns Jewish weddings, with which Christ was familiar. The timing of the marriage (sometimes called betrothal, although it was legally binding) and its consummation and celebration, which with arranged marriages could be several years apart, was chosen by the bridegroom’s father. An example of this is found in Christ’s parable of the wedding feast in the gospel of Matthew. “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come” (Matthew 22:2). It was the father of the groom who determined the time of the celebration of the marriage.

A likely fulfilment of this parable is found in Revelation 19:4-9 where it is God the Father, not the Lamb, who seems to instigate His Son’s wedding feast.

From Christ’s parable and Paul’s analogy it would appear that Jesus still does not know exactly when He will return to earth, resurrect the righteous dead, and marry His Bride.

**Q** Did the Lord Jesus Christ have any brothers and sisters?

FAQ

**A** Scripture tells us that He did. When the Jews of Jesus’ hometown heard Him speak, they were indignant. Matthew records their contempt for Him: “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?” (Matthew 13:55-56).

Jesus’ neighbours knew His family intimately. From their comments, we know that Mary had four other sons and at least two daughters. The Bible says “sisters” instead of “sister,” so we know there were at least two.

James and Judas (Jude) wrote the New Testament books that bear their names.

## Let the Bible Answer...

### What does the Bible say about human life?

*The Hebrew term “nephesh” includes all physical life, human and animal, and is often translated “soul”.*

*The life is in the blood: Leviticus 17:11; Isaiah 53:12.*

*The soul can die: Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Matthew 10:28.*

*All life is God’s: Isaiah 42:5; Ezekiel 18:4; Acts 17:25.*

*God can direct life even in the womb: Job 31:13-15; Psalm 139:13-16; Ecclesiastes 11:5; Jeremiah 1:5.*



## Letters From Our Readers

### Meaningful prayer

Your magazine and Supplement are edifying and encouraging. The Supplement article on meaningful prayer [March/April issue] gave me insight and blessing.

*Reader in Manchester*

I am really enjoying the exposition of the Lord's prayer. A different way of looking at the "model prayer."

*Reader in London*

### Reading material during lockdown

As always your materials, be they the magazine, booklets, *Bible Study Course* or the *Beyond Today* television programme [see: [www.ucg.org/beyond-today/beyond-today-television-program](http://www.ucg.org/beyond-today/beyond-today-television-program)] is such an inspiration and blessing to me.

*Reader in Belfast*

I have been re-reading all my booklets and look forward to the next issue [of *Beyond Today* magazine]. I am praying God keeps my family safe while we are in lockdown.

*Reader in Maidstone*

I so look forward to receiving your magazines. More so in these really scary times we are now living in.

*Reader in Rugby*

Please renew my subscription. I treasure *Beyond Today*. It gives me great support especially in these sad times. Please send me the booklets mentioned above. I read your booklets eagerly.

*Reader in Cheltenham*

The information that comes from *Beyond Today* has always been welcome to me, but especially so in this time of lockdown. I enclose a small donation.

*Reader in London*

Thank you so much for the *Beyond Today* magazine and Supplement. I always look forward to receiving them. God bless you for this vital information.

*Reader from Stockton-on-Tees*

### **Seven Prophetic Signs Before Jesus Returns**

I have been asking God for this kind of information in one document so I can share it with those seeking God at this time. Please send me as many copies as you are able to.

*Reader in Derby*

### **Bible Study Course**

I am taking my time, looking up every reference and praying.

*Student in Belfast*

I'm really enjoying this course. I want to do well. I am even getting my own Bible to help me – a New King James Version, as I believe that is the Bible you use.

*Student in London*

*Editor's comment: We advise students to turn to and read every scripture reference. Additionally, writing out the verses aids memory. Why we primarily use the NKJV is explained on pages 24-32 of our booklet How To Understand the Bible.*

## How this work is supported

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