

BEYOND TODAY

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Gifts foreshadowed Jesus' roles

When Jesus was a young child, wise men presented Him with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Each symbolised a different responsibility, which He would later assume. Knowing who Christ is and His purpose is a precious gift to us.

According to the Jews, Jesus of Nazareth was simply a preacher who spoke out against the religious leaders of the day and the Roman occupation. He was consequently executed for His trouble. In the eyes of Muslims, He was merely a prophet. Others, contrary to historical records, don't believe He existed at all.

The gospel of Matthew records that wise men travelled from the East to worship Jesus when He was a young child: "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him'" (Matthew 2:1-2).

Although not Jews, they had adequate understanding of the writings of Israelite prophets and were wise enough to recognise the timing of Christ's birth. Thus, they came to worship the King of the Jews.

How does one honour a king? By bestowing him with tribute. "And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11).

The three kinds of gift offered suggest that they understood at least in part who Jesus was, who He was intended to be, and what He was going to do.

Gold - the metal of kings

Gold is very soft so its uses are largely ornamental. However, its beauty and rarity makes it precious. When King Solomon was young, he asked God for wisdom. God was so impressed that Solomon had not asked for wealth that He promised him wealth also. That wealth included massive amounts of gold (1 Kings 9:28; 10:2, 10, 14, 21).

The gift of gold emphasised Jesus' role as King when He returns to the earth.

Thus the gift of gold emphasises Jesus' future role as King when He returns to earth to establish His father's Kingdom at the beginning of the millennium. At that time the age of man ends and Jesus will become "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 11:15; 19:16).

Whilst being questioned by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, Jesus stated: "My kingdom is not of this

world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”

Pilate then asked: “Are You a king then?”

Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth” (John 18:36-37).

But what about now? Do we see Jesus as our king? Does He rule in our hearts? Is His will foremost in our minds? Do we serve Him in everything we do? Does He have dominion over our lives?

Gold shimmers, but Jesus shines much brighter. During His transfiguration, His face shone like the sun and His garments became as white as light (Matthew 17:2). The first gift of the wise men was significant because it foreshadowed Christ’s future reign.

Symbolic of priesthood

Frankincense is the fragrant gum resin harvested from balsam trees in remote areas of Arabia, North Africa and India. Gathering resin was time consuming, taking two or three months for sap to leak from the tree and harden into crystals. It is then transported long distances by caravan. When burned, it produces a fragrance associated with prayer (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 8:3-4).

It was used as incense by the priests when worshipping God in the Old Testament. Before Jesus became our High Priest, there was generally no direct access to God. The family line of Levi served as intercessors between the people and God and offered sacrifices to cover sin in order to maintain that relationship. Of the priests, a descendant of Aaron (brother of Moses) became the high priest. He had the solemn duty to enter the Most Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement. This area within the sanctuary contained the mercy seat on top of the ark of the covenant which represented God’s throne in heaven. Here before God’s very presence the high priest was to offer a blood sacrifice as a sin offering for the Israelites. For the rest of the year, a veil separated God’s presence even from the priests.

When Jesus, the sacrificial lamb of God, offered Himself up “once for all,” the veil that separated the Most Holy Place, where God’s presence resided, was miraculously torn in two from top to bottom, symbolising an access to God that hitherto was not possible. The fulfilment of the sacrificial system was complete and Jesus had qualified to assume the role of High Priest.

Thus, the gift of frankincense mirrors Jesus as our High Priest. Christ’s eternal role as High Priest is further



Frankincense is burned as incense, the scented smoke thus produced being likened in Scripture to the prayers of the saints.

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explained in Hebrews 7:23-27.

As our Intercessor now, Jesus pleads our cause akin to being in a court. He intercedes for us with our Heavenly Father, and assists as we struggle with our weaknesses.

Do we take Jesus as our High Priest for granted? Do we come boldly to the throne of grace seeking mercy, relying on Him to intercede for us with the Father? (Hebrews 4:15-17). Do we allow Him to take our burdens and cleanse us from unrighteousness? Instead of carrying around guilt of sin when we stumble, do we remember that we have a High Priest who can sympathise with our weaknesses?

A gift foreshadowing death

Myrrh was also harvested from trees in Africa and Arabia. It was used as holy anointing oil and as a perfume. Mark describes the drink offered to Jesus as He was on the cross as wine mingled with myrrh.

One of the main uses of this fragrant gum was embalming the dead. Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Jesus. He asked Pilate’s permission to take away Christ’s corpse from the cross. Together with Nicodemus, he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes to prepare the body for burial (John 19:38-39).

Myrrh may have seemed a strange gift to give a baby or child. Why would the wise men give a child a gift that reminded the parents He would die? The point is that it’s not a symbol of His death so much as what was to be accomplished by His death.

When speaking to Joseph after he found out Mary was with child, the angel assured him: “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will

save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Christ was to become our Saviour.

Sin is a foreign concept today. To most, in a sinful, secular society, it no longer means the transgression of God’s law. Instead, humans have devised their own socially based laws that are ever changing. What God considers to be sinful, man says is good. Truly, today we see society calling what is good evil, and what is evil good (Isaiah 5:20).

The penalty of sin is death, and there is nothing that we can do of ourselves to erase that from our record. Doing good in the future can’t erase past sin; and conversely, doing good in the past can’t negate the penalty of future sins. Since we have all sinned, we cannot atone for ourselves.

Transgression of God’s laws requires a blood sacrifice. As Moses recorded: “For the life of the flesh is in the

What God considers to be sinful, man says is good. Truly, today we see society calling what is good evil, and what is evil good.

blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11).

Animal sacrifices were insufficient to remove the people’s sins but they taught a lesson. Christ allowed Himself to be sacrificed – a blood sacrifice from a living being without blemish. Since He created all things His life’s blood is sufficient to pay the penalty of everyone’s sins. Since all have sinned, all are under the penalty of sin, meaning all have earned the death penalty. Those who repent and seek God’s way of life can claim this sacrifice to be freed from the consequence of sin, which is death. Christ paid this penalty on our behalf, but we must repent and ask for our death penalty to be covered by His shed blood (Hebrews 9:22-28).

Do we take this precious sacrifice for granted? Do we stop and reflect upon what Jesus did for us? He laid aside His divinity, became a flesh-and-blood human and lived a completely sinless life. Then He was falsely accused, illegally tried, savagely beaten, tortured, and killed for our sake (Philippians 2:5-11).

Only Jesus could atone for the sins of all people because He had no death penalty on His record and He was

God in the flesh. It is only because of God’s grace that we can be saved. There is no other way sin and its penalty can be expunged.

Do we show sufficient gratitude for the mercy, this grace – unmerited favour – that was shown to us? As a result of Jesus’ sacrifice, we can ask for God’s mercy. Not only does He forgive, but He blots out our transgressions such that He remembers them no more!

Each of us needs a Saviour. Someone willing to bear our death sentence upon His shoulders. We need to be cleansed and made holy before we can see God and abide with Him. The gift of myrrh foreshadows this third role.

Our role

So what is our part in this process. What’s expected of us? The apostle Paul wrote: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).

To be a living sacrifice can be summarised as aiming to “be holy, because He is holy.” A blood sacrifice to atone for sin meant that something or someone had to die. But a living sacrifice is consecrated and offered to God. In everything that we do and think, we are to embody the holiness of God.

The process by which God transforms us begins in the mind. We are to reject this world and its ways and put on Christ. Paul says that this is our reasonable service. And it is reasonable, because without a Saviour, we would have no hope. To learn more of the roles of Jesus Christ please request or download our booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

Most of the world may not know Jesus or understand what He has done for them. Having been sacrificed to be our Saviour, Christ currently sits at the right hand of the Father as High Priest. He makes intercession on our behalf and allows us to come before God in a direct relationship with Him. When He returns, Christ will establish God’s Kingdom on earth and take up His rightful role as its King.

Do we live our lives in a way that honours and respects the three roles represented by the gifts the wise men presented to the Christ Child – our King, High Priest, and Saviour?

Mark Mirigian

A favourable reputation is a precious attribute

Our character is defined by how we are perceived. As followers of Christ God's influence on our lives should be evident.

Whether we wish to believe it or not, our reputation is paramount. We cannot buy a good name, nor can we inherit one.

Wise King Solomon wrote, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1). He reiterated this thought in Ecclesiastes 7:1: "A good name is better than precious ointment."

Each of us probably remembers school or college classmates whose behaviour we sincerely hope would have improved as they have grown older. They might have been fun to hang out with at a party, but their reputation showed them to be unreliable, often in trouble or prone to deceit.

What we really need are rock-solid people who can be relied upon when needed. All they require is a call and they'll be there to assist. You turn to these people when the chips are down.

Dictionary.com defines reputation as: "The estimation in which a person or thing is held, especially by the community or the public generally; good name; a favourable and publicly recognised name or standing for merit; achievement, reliability, etc."

True colours

A good reputation can be quickly tarnished – possibly beyond repair. Laudable characteristics such as integrity, honesty and kindness can be forgotten with one inappropriate action. It is common to hear people say, "I don't care what others think of me." That attitude cannot be backed up by Scripture. Disciples of Christ are imperfect people, but they continually strive for perfection (Matthew 5:48).

We are to be people of integrity. If we are not, sooner or later our true colours will shine through. What goes through your mind when biblical characters like Abraham, David, Cain and Jezebel are mentioned? How do you categorise them? Simply put, we mentally classify them as heroes and villains according to their character

and renown. Although still imperfect, Abraham features prominently in the faith chapter of the Bible (Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-19) and has been described as "the father of all those who believe" (Romans 8:11). His reputation was of one who was faithful. David is noted as "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14; 1 Kings 15:5). Whereas Cain is remembered for murdering his brother (Genesis 4:8) and Jezebel for her cruelty, harlotry and idolatry (1 Kings 21:1-16; 2 Kings 9:22).

Stay positive

Reputation is not what we say we are. The old adage, "Our actions are speaking so loudly about us that people cannot hear what we say about ourselves," should be true

Reputation is not how good we think we are, but rather how others perceive us.

for all Christ's followers. Reputation is not how good we think we are, but rather how others perceive us.

One tip is not to talk negatively about anyone except perhaps in a one-on-one situation where a matter of discord needs to be discussed, or within a group environment where criticism is requested (Matthew 18:15-17). In both cases comments should be given kindly and in a humble manner. If you can't think of positive aspects to mention, it may be better to remain silent. This can be very hard for some, but it's a key part of developing a sound reputation.

An imitator of Christ should be honest and truthful in all of his or her dealings. Being unreliable or untrustworthy damages credibility and reflects badly on God and Christ. Keep your word, even if a better offer presents itself (Psalm 15:4, last part). If you have inadvertently promised to carry out wrong or foolish actions, extricate yourself from the situation (Proverbs 6:1-3).

Be punctual, especially for work, and try your best to complete tasks on time. If you work for someone, be diligent, loyal and trustworthy. Go beyond what is expected and try to help others achieve their goals. If you are the boss, treat your workers fairly and with respect (Ephesians 6:5-9).

Be faithful in marriage – the life-long joining of a husband and wife represents the spiritual relationship Christ has with the Church (Ephesians 5:25-33).

Keep anger under control (Proverbs 16:31). Practise using a soft response if someone approaches you in an angry state (Proverbs 15:1; Ecclesiastes 7:9).

Drunkenness and drug abuse add nothing to one's prestige (Proverbs 20:1).

Where possible help those less fortunate (Proverbs 14:31). Acts of kindness rarely go unnoticed.

Keep your own counsel. Don't tell others about a third party's business and be careful what you say about your own. Don't pass on information about others, even if it is true. If it is true, and you need to report it, for example if criminal activity is involved, or where there is danger to life, ensure you inform the correct authorities, not everyone on social media (Proverbs 11:13).

Along with keeping your own counsel, guard your tongue. The epistle of James, the "brother of the Lord,"

devotes several verses to the importance of controlling our tongues (James 3:1-12). Above all don't use foul, malicious or blasphemous language (Exodus 20:7; Ephesians 4:29).

Strive to observe the Golden Rule – "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (Matthew 7:12).

It does not matter how excellent your reputation has been and how long it has been that way, it can become a "stink" with a little foolishness (Ecclesiastes 10:1). We need to be cautious and stick to doing what we know to be right. It is far harder to rebuild a damaged reputation than to maintain a good one.

A lasting legacy

What does your life say about you? If you died today for what would you be remembered? As with the aforementioned biblical characters, reputation can follow us far beyond every victory we win in this life. We defend our good reputation by maintaining an honourable lifestyle.

Guard your reputation. It is worth more than silver or gold. For more tips on building and maintaining a favourable reputation please request or download our booklet *Making Life Work*.

Ademola Adesupo

Dealing with depression

We live in stressful times and it is easy to become depressed. Scripture offers helpful suggestions to improve our mood.

Clinical depression is a serious illness, with various physical, mental and social symptoms that have the ability to incapacitate. Those with such symptoms should seek specialised counselling and medical guidance in addition to applying some biblical tools.

Depression, in everyday terminology, usually refers to periods of unusual sadness, of prolonged fear or worry, or of feeling overwhelmed by stress or distress. The immediate response is often to forget past successes, to feel hopeless and vulnerable and to want to give up. No Christian is immune. Even some of the great men in the Bible suffered from depression on occasion.

After a long, close relationship with God and a string of miracles, the prophet Elijah became prey to depression when Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him. In fairness, Elijah was tired following a long period of stress and this probably ex-

acerbated his sense of discouragement and hopelessness.

Nonetheless, God did not want him to remain in this condition. In a quiet, compassionate way, God explained to Elijah what he could not see in his irrational state, that he was not alone, and that God would continue to support him in the work he had to do. Read about Elijah's recovery in 1 Kings 19:1-18. The book of Proverbs has much to say on depression and worry and offers useful guidance (Proverbs 12:25; 13:12; 15:13; 18:14).

In Luke 12:22-31, Jesus Christ explained the futility of worry, a trait that often leads to depression. In verse 28 He highlighted the cause of the problem when He called His disciples, "O you of little faith."

Apart from stress or fatigue, for a Christian depression may indicate a lack of faith in God. It would be easier if, following water baptism and the laying-on-of-hands for

the receipt of the Holy Spirit, we could all be immediately filled with faith, love and patience. It does not happen like that. Instead, Christ expects us to develop these characteristics through experiences and even trials, just as we learn obedience to His law. Christians should not remain in a depressive state.

As God dealt with Elijah in the Old Testament, so Jesus Christ deals with Christians today. Through His own suffering while here on earth, Jesus learned compassion for His people (Hebrews 4:14-16). Christ knows that we are weak and prone to fears, doubts and worry that can lead to depression. But He is always there to assist when we are overburdened, and promises to give us rest (Matthew 11:28-30).

What we can do

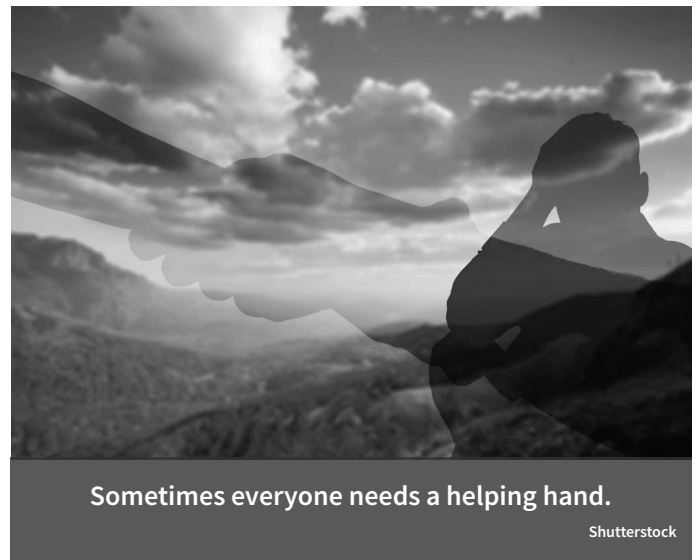
In practical terms, is there anything we can do when anxiety, worry or depression threaten to engulf us? There is, but it takes mental effort and it often means noticing potential problems before they take hold. The apostle Paul instructs us to be “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). When a fearful thought or a worry first enters your head, ask God for His help to dispel it. Do not give it either time or space to implant itself in your mind. Although easier said than done at first, with perseverance, it does begin to work.

Paul also admonishes us: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, what ever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

As Christians, we ought to be familiar with the promises God has made to us. Remember the great love the Father and Jesus Christ have shown us by providing a way by which we can be rescued from our sins. Meditating on these things can bring us comfort in times of sorrow. Read scriptures such as John 3:16-17, Luke 12:32 and Revelation 21:1-7. Try actively imagining what the millennium will be like, or the New Jerusalem. Scriptures such as Isaiah 11:6-9; 35:1-10 and Revelation 22 may help here. You could even imagine yourself being there. However, we should not lose sight of present reality.

Develop a support system

Nurturing a relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ forms the foundation of mental well-being. Tapping into the support of other Christians is also a must. A trusted friend who you can text, phone or email, knowing he or she will not divulge your personal in-



formation to others, can be a valuable asset. Maybe you could arrange for someone to contact you from time to time, just to let you know you are not alone. Perhaps you could become involved in something which improves your life, without adding further stress – physical activities such as dancing, swimming and team sports may have some merit. Community projects, such as a neighbourhood garden, can have great mental health benefits for volunteers.

Perhaps the chief benefit of uplifting social contact is that it provides us the opportunity to learn how to love and serve. This also is vital to mental health.

Do not become discouraged if you cannot overcome depression or worry all at once. As the apostle Peter wrote, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Conquering depression can be likened to trying to climb out of a slippery pit. We can set off with good intentions and then slide back into it. It is a long journey but we must persist with God’s help. Christians are those growing to be like Christ and we all still have much to learn.

There are a number of useful Bible Study Guides relating to stress, anxiety and depression on our web site www.ucg.org/litlibrary/. Or request our free booklet *You Can Have Living Faith* and the two free reprints “Depression: Ways to Win the Battle” and “The Bible’s Keys to Mental Health.”

Also available to watch are two interviews with Andi Chapman, a registered nurse and clinical educator, on the subjects of anxiety and depression. They can be viewed at: ucg.org/beyond-today/beyond-today-interviews.

*Adapted from a United Church of God
Question and Answer*



Q Please explain Luke 14:26-33, which seems to say that we should hate family members.
Reader from Sutton Coldfield

A This passage can sound quite harsh if taken out of context with the rest of the Bible. What did Jesus intend when He said that “if anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children . . . he cannot be My disciple”? (Luke 14:26).

In arriving at Christ’s meaning we need to recognise that the Bible teaches that we are not to hate anyone, not even our enemies. Instead we are to love our neighbours as ourselves. That is the teaching in both Old and New Testaments (Leviticus 19:18 and Mark 12:31). Hating any human being cannot be what Jesus had in mind. Such an emotion was never reflected in His life and teaching.

The Nelson Study Bible has this to say about what this wording means: “It refers to desiring something less than something else. This expression was especially appropriate in Jesus’ days, since a decision for Jesus could mean rejection by family and persecution even to the point of death. Those who feared family disapproval or persecu-

tion would not come to Jesus . . . Therefore a disciple must be ready to face and accept such rejection.”

In our calling, God has to come first in our lives and that can often mean that our own family is against us. That doesn’t mean that we cut ourselves off from our own family. We follow what Jesus said in Matthew 22:21, “Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”

Jesus’ words were not intended to insist that His disciples abandon close family, as the apostle Paul mentions his colleagues, including Peter, being accompanied in their ministries by their wives (1 Corinthians 9:5). In Peter’s case, Christ had previously healed his mother-in-law, so this was a long-standing marriage relationship that had existed before Peter was called (Matthew 8:14).

The seriousness of becoming Christ’s disciple is further highlighted in verses 27-33 of Luke 14, where an individual willing to follow Christ needs to count the cost before making a firm commitment to stay the course. In Luke 9:62 Christ says, “No one, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Christ tried to get the point across to the rich young ruler that his wealth had become an idol – something he had put before God (Matthew 19:16-22). He was unwilling to forsake everything for Christ. In contrast, Zaccheus promised: “I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold” (Luke 19:1-10). His attitude was completely different to that of the young ruler.

In the last book of the Bible Jesus tells us to “hold fast what you have till I come” (Revelation 2:25). This is not referring to physical possessions but to the truth of God and the way of life Christ modelled for us.

In following Jesus Christ we are to serve both God and man, including our own families, but our service to God should always take precedence.

Q Revelation 13:3-4 mentions a beast whose “deadly wound was healed.” To what is this referring?
Reader from Blackburn

A This refers to the fall of the Roman Empire in AD 476 and its revivals as the Holy Roman Empire, firstly under Justinian in AD 554. Rome was the last of four empires described in Daniel chapters 2 and 7.

Five further revivals followed, and we await the seventh which will exist at the return of Jesus Christ and will fight against Him. For an overview of the history of these superpowers, their predecessors and their ultimate demise, please request or download our Bible study aid *The Final Superpower*.

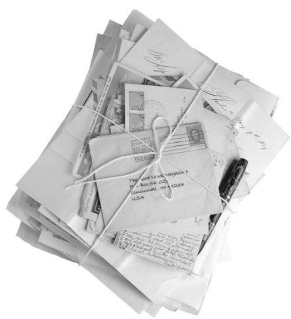
Let the Bible Answer...

What does the Bible teach about gentleness?

We should respond gently to those who disagree with us: Proverbs 15:1; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:1-3; 1 Peter 3:9.

Gentleness is a hallmark of a Christian: Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 4:5; 1 Timothy 6:11.

Christ set an example of gentleness even under extreme provocation: Luke 22:47-53; 1 Peter 2:21-23.



Letters From Our Readers

Biblical truth

I am thankful that *Beyond Today* stands up and defends biblical authority in the face of the world's cancel culture that seeks to destroy it.
Reader in Plymouth

The more one learns about the Bible, one finds there is always something else to learn. Truly a book that can never be ignored.
Reader in Hull

In testing times *Beyond Today* is a great comfort – a true blessing. To know the truth at last is wonderful,
Reader in Londonderry

Great learning

It's a pleasure to study [this Bible course]. Well explained and easy to understand.
Student in Morden

I have done lots of Bible lessons years ago. The ones you sent I am finding harder. I will keep trying. I don't want to give up.
Student in London

Valuable material

Thank you for all the materials which you have supplied over the years. I have found them very informative, inspiring and thought-provoking.
Reader in Birmingham

Thanks for the encouragement I gain from reading *Beyond Today*.
Reader in Cheadle

Please renew my subscription to *Beyond Today* magazine. It helps me

make sense of the awful way events are going in the world.
Reader in Osset

Thank you for your most helpful and informative magazine. Please keep sending them.
Reader in Bedford

I find the study booklets brilliant.
Reader in Rickmansworth

Your *Beyond Today* magazines have been a real source of inspiration. Something to hold on to.
Reader in London

I always find your teachings sound and very valuable.
Reader in Ireland

Thank you for your excellent magazine. It is a source of invaluable information and I learn a great deal from it.
Reader in Southall

I really appreciate your continued supply of important topics for these end times we are all facing.
Reader in Lough

Aid for spiritual growth

By reading your magazine I have experienced a great change in my Christian walk. I want to continue receiving the magazine.
Reader in Wolverhampton

Please continue sending me *Beyond Today*. It is a great help for my spiritual life and a support in these godless times.
Reader in Wolverhampton

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