

BEYOND TODAY

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Godliness: A life-long quest

Seeking personal devotion to God and taking on His character is a disciple's responsibility and calling.

Simon Peter was personally selected by Jesus Christ to follow Him, becoming one of His earliest disciples. Years later, writing to scattered Church members, Peter asked a rhetorical question the context of which was the Day of the Lord when the present age ends.

This was Peter's question: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" (2 Peter 3:10-13). How would we answer that question? This is a challenging thought on which all should ponder periodically.

Godliness, both the word and characteristic, is today much diminished in everyday use. Its essence encapsulates those who walk with and please God and are devoted to Him, reflecting godly character in their conduct.

Godliness is not simply a synonym for Christian character. It is far deeper than that, it addresses the totality of a disciple's life, and provides the foundation upon which Christian character is built. The Greek noun from which the word is translated means "reverence, respect, piety towards God."

A time for training

The New Testament records that Paul the apostle mentored Timothy, a young follower of the Christian way, encouraging him to be a good minister or servant of Jesus Christ. Paul told him "But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that

which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:7-8). By the words "exercise yourself toward godliness" Paul intended Timothy to train himself, work at it and persevere with it. Paul added that this characteristic is profitable for all things – those things of the life that now is, and those of the life which is to come.

Other English translations of the Bible have "train yourself to be godly," a wording which highlights and encourages personal responsibility.

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Notice also how Paul began his epistle to Titus, another young minister who was responsible for congregations on the island of Crete. Paul wrote: "the acknowledgement of the truth which accords with godliness . . ." (Titus 1:1). That those he mentored sought this vital component was uppermost in the apostle's thinking

Examples for today

Continuing to address Titus, Paul encouraged him to teach that Christians must resist worldly lusts, living soberly and righteously instead, whilst they await the glorious second coming of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-15).

Paul's intention was to highlight the transition between

two worlds or two ages, in order to stir up God's people to live holy and godly lives, whatever the challenges. This way of living isn't some optional extra; it is required.

Simon Peter acknowledged that he was a bondservant and an apostle of Jesus Christ; he confirmed that God's divine power affords disciples all that pertains to a godly life, with the result that they become partakers of the divine nature required for entrance into Christ's Kingdom at His return (2 Peter 1:1-4).

Imagine that: God gives His children everything they need for a life that pleases Him, because they have been called by His own glory and by His grace.

A disciple's pursuit

Those called by God should appreciate that it is both a privilege and a duty to pursue godliness, to train themselves for it and to practise it, becoming expert at it. We do not require special talent or equipment for this task – although, in addition to God's divine power, His Holy Spirit, we do need personal motivation, and we will benefit from the encouragement and guidance of other followers of the Christian way.

To illustrate the foundation on which godly character is built, consider the example of Enoch, the father of Methuselah. The Bible records that in the days before the

Flood he walked with God (Genesis 5:21-24). In Hebrews 11:5 we learn that he pleased God. Walking with God and pleasing God are the essence of godliness. Enoch's life was focussed on God, the One who figured uppermost in his thinking.

Godly devotion is important because it implies a personal attitude towards the Almighty that results in behaviour that is pleasing to Him. Devotion is not an activity, in the sense of "doing our daily devotions". Our devotion should encompass the fear of God, love for Him and the desire for Him, doing all to His glory and impacting all aspects of our lives (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Another way of putting that is found in Colossians 3:17. Paul advises that in everything we do, from our innermost thoughts to our external behaviour, we are to do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Nothing should be excluded. It must not leave gaps, or have hidden or secret recesses or voids.

Is this a challenge? Yes! But that is the thrust of the first great commandment which, as stated in Matthew 22:37-38, is to love God with all our being, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment."

David Fenney

What became of Enoch?

The answer to one of the Bible's mysteries

Hebrews 11:5 states: "Enoch was translated that he should not see death" (King James Version). The verse continues with a quotation from Genesis 5, saying that he "was not found." The New King James Version uses "taken away" instead of "translated." The wording implies that someone was looking for him to cause him harm, and that God protected him by removing him to a safe place.

Some have assumed that God took him to heaven, but the verse does not say that. "Translated" or "taken away" is from the Greek word *metatithemi* and means "to transfer to another place" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, 1985).

The Bible teaches that no man has ascended to heaven. What we find in Acts 2:29 and 34 clearly illustrates this fact. It says that righteous King David was still

in his grave about 1,000 years after his death! Remember Jesus' comment in John 10:35, "the Scripture cannot be broken." That is, its teachings are consistent throughout. The biblical teaching is that heaven is not the reward or the destiny of the saved.

Hebrews 11:13 confirms that all the faithful listed in this chapter, including Enoch, died. Verses 39-40 add that they have not yet received the promise God made to them and are waiting for others – the "us" mentioned.

A more complete explanation of all that the Bible teaches about the afterlife is available in our booklets *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* and *What Happens After Death?* If you do not have copies on hand, we would be happy to send them to you. Or you can find them online at the literature library of our website at www.ucg.org/booklets.

Benefits of gratitude

It should become second nature to us all to express thankfulness and appreciation to God for everything in our daily lives.

Studies have shown that people who express gratitude experience improved sleep, lower stress, and more meaningful relationships. Thankfulness not only benefits us physically, but it also draws us closer to God. It is the actual expression of our recognition and acknowledgment of the kindness done to us.

Thankfulness creates contentment

Gratitude is a state of mind. It produces a content and positive perspective which does not focus on what one does not possess, but values what one has, no matter how basic.

The apostle Paul wrote: “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

He goes on to warn: “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition” (1 Timothy 6:9). This is the opposite of the contentment that real thankfulness generates. God wants us to be grateful for what we have received. To be content does not mean one has to give up on his or her dreams or goals. It does not mean it is sinful to desire better things in life. But when we begin to compare what others have from an attitude that we deserve the same or even better it creates a covetous attitude that will erase contentment. We should be careful not to allow a genuine desire or need to become distorted into a greedy or covetous attitude.

Freedom from fear and anxiety

Constant life struggles and worries create stress. At times, it is easy to believe God is distant when we are going through pain or suffering.

The apostle Paul and his companions suffered much for the sake of the Gospel. Acts 16:23-26 records: “And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the

foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.”

We may not be in as dire a situation as they were, but praising God and giving thanks can set us free from shackles of self pity, worry and fear. Gratitude increases peace of mind and tranquillity. A truly thankful person is not an individual who worries unduly. Being grateful transfers our thoughts from our perceived problems to God instead. When our perspectives shift off us and onto the Almighty, we start to experience joy that liberates us from fear and anxiety.

Antidote to ingratitude

Thankfulness is a godly virtue and the Bible contains many powerful examples of the danger of ingratitude. One such is the account of the Israelites in the wilderness. Exodus 16:13-16 explains how God fed His people. This is one of the most important Old Testament miracles God performed, providing food for His people when there was none. Manna gave them sustenance, and thereby God was proving Himself to His people. .

We should be careful not to allow a genuine desire or need to become distorted into a greedy or covetous attitude.

So how did the Israelites respond to God’s gift? Numbers chapter 11:4-6 tells us that these people were already putting God to the test by their ingratitude! They missed a valuable opportunity to persevere in faith, to recognise that, though the road to freedom had its share of hardships, God would soon give them much more. Do we become impatient and unthankful whilst God is working on providing solutions to our problems? The Israelites focused on the here and now and thereby became ungrateful. We can get into a thankless attitude sometimes, when we feel like we’ve suffered the most or not gained the best out of life. Let’s be on guard and stay alert.

A spur to develop humility

Every day, we have so much to be grateful for, from

the air we breathe to rain and sunshine. We see the glory of the Creator in His creation. Being thankful reveals an attitude of humility towards God. It shows God we know and understand that everything comes from Him and that we are mindful of His generosity.

It is God's will for us to have an attitude of thankfulness towards Him. When we have an appreciative attitude there will be no room for ingratitude in our lives (Psalm 95:2-6). It will help us get our eyes off the self and focus on God. It keeps us in a place of humility and dependency upon Him. It reminds us that He is the giver of all good things and our sufficiency is from God. Thankfulness gives us vitality and enthusiasm. Grateful attitudes inspire all other good virtues. A thankful heart is vital to our spiritual health. It is key to overflowing joy, and means one operates from a stance of abundance, rather than scarcity. That abundance comes from God.

Delight the heart of God

In the Old Testament, God's people were required to offer animal sacrifices as an atonement for sin. Yet, God did not require sacrifices because it pleased Him. In fact, it was done to picture the ultimate sacrifice that was yet to come – Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. At Christ's death, the physical sacrifices that were part of the Old Covenant were no longer required.

God, however, still requires the offering of *spiritual* sacrifices, including those of giving thanks (Psalm 50:13-14). These verses clearly explain that God has no need of "the flesh of bulls, or the blood of goats" that would be offered during a sacrifice. Instead, He wants us to offer Him thanksgiving and praise. King David understood this: "And he appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, and to record, and to thank and praise the LORD God of Israel" (1 Chronicles 16:4).

Today, God expects these same sacrifices of thanksgiving from us through our actions and prayers. The apostle Paul wrote: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1Thessalonians 5:16-18).

This is how we can delight God each day! To be effective, our thanksgiving must be spontaneous and from the heart, rather than an expression of routine formality.

How does our heavenly Father feel when we only express occasional or no thanks at all? Knowing He has done what is perfect for us, yet we just shrug it off? How would we respond if we were treated likewise?

Our thanksgiving to God should be so heartfelt He will never feel regret blessing us or feel that He is being spurned by us.

Appreciation for God's plan of salvation

Eternal life is the most precious gift we could ever possibly receive. Our everyday prayer, thoughts and words should reflect a positive mindset of hope and joy in thankfulness toward our Father for His glorious plan of salvation and the part we play in it.

Christians, more than ever, need to give thanks. Times are becoming tougher and more evil, world events are moving faster, and life is seeming more precarious with every passing day. Gratitude helps to lift us above these pessimisms, focusing us on what is good, making us count our blessings, forcing us to remember that we have divine help.

Through His calling, God opens a door leading out of enslavement to sin and death. By our repentance and obedience we gain a freedom that will lead to eternal life. Let's make sure we thank Him more often.

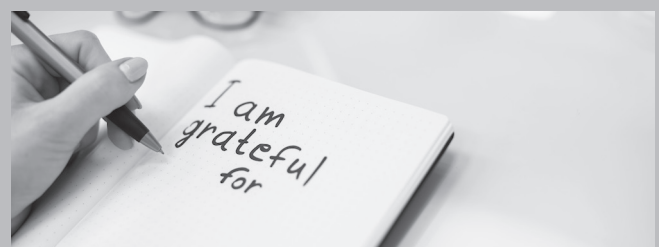
Ademola Adesupo

A record of thankfulness

In difficult times it is encouraging to recall a history of past blessings.

Our list of reasons to thank God is endless, but sometimes we might have difficulty thinking of those reasons, because the challenges of this life seem so overwhelming that we can't see past them to the amazing deeds God has done for us.

With notoriously short memories, humans can struggle to regain the sense of wonder at answered prayers. Too often we can regress from joy and faith one moment to hopelessness the next, when something doesn't seem to happen as we anticipate. Keeping a journal of some sort in which to record miracles or examples of God's favour and help in our lives can be an encouragement at such times. It helps us to remember all our Heavenly Father does for us.



Perspective on fearing God

The emotion of fear can evoke feelings of sheer terror at one end of the spectrum to a deep, loving respect at the other.

In the Bible, as elsewhere, sometimes the intended meaning of a word may need clarification. “Fear” has so many connotations that many have concluded that the Being who interacted with humankind in the Old Testament was often angry bringing destruction on those who consistently broke His law or disobeyed Him. Given that God declares He is love, it would seem inappropriate to suggest that He is seeking to produce terror in those with whom He is working.

King David asserted: “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Psalm 19:9).

His son Solomon wrote: “The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death” (Proverbs 14:27). Neither of these verses indicate that God is the author of terror, but conversely of life – even offering eternal life.

These verses show the fear of God in a positive light, so we must conclude that the intended meaning is akin to a deep respect and reverence for Him and His commands (Isaiah 66:1-2).

Fear God, not mankind

Jesus warns His disciples “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Here Christ is explaining that other mortals may kill, but God can resurrect.

It is very important therefore to follow God’s instructions as opposed to the ideas of human beings or being held hostage to their threats. Proverbs 29:25 states: “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.” A snare is a trap, either literally or figuratively.

There are many instances in Scripture where someone who

should have known better allowed the fear of men to override respect for God. One such was Israel’s first king, Saul. God had instructed him to destroy a people known as the Amalekites together with all their belongings. Instead, Saul kept their king alive along with their animals, as well as holding on to many of their possessions. This is recorded in 1 Samuel 15. Saul finally admitted his disobedience: “Then Saul said to Samuel, ‘I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice’” (verse 24).

The fear of man ensnared King Saul and resulted in God taking the kingdom from him and giving it to David.

Perhaps better known is Peter’s denial of Christ recorded in the gospels. After Christ’s arrest, the former fisherman followed at a distance to the high priest’s courtyard where he was recognised as one of the disciples. For fear of what might happen to him, three times he denied knowing Christ (Matthew 26:30-35, 69-75).

King David, who authored many of the psalms declared: “In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Psalm 56:11).

Other unnamed psalmists wrote: “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man” (Psalm 118:8) and “Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help” (Psalm 146:3).

The antidote to the snare of the fear of man is to have the right respect for the Almighty and His word and to not stray from His instructions, no matter how another might try to instil fear, or manipulate by guilt. A disciple’s heart should always trust in God.

Philip Perry



Humankind, it seems, either fails to respect God at all, or lives in terror of Him taking action against the wicked or irreverent. Events such as Noah’s Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the earth swallowing up rebellious Korah and his associates are treated as fables, when in fact they should produce a deep respect for God and His word.

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Soul and spirit

*In both the Old and New Testaments, the Bible refers to the “soul” and the “spirit.”
What are these and how are they different?*

Mainstream Christianity generally teaches that the soul is an immortal component of human beings; that upon our death, it is released from our bodies to spend eternity in either eternal bliss or eternal torment, depending on our conduct in this life. But a closer examination of the word shows that this is not the case.

The only Hebrew word translated as “soul” in the Old Testament, *nephesh*, is also translated elsewhere as “creature” or “being.” All three words are used synonymously. We can look at God’s creation of “an abundance of living creatures [*nephesh*]” in the sea (Genesis 1:20), or “man became a living being [*nephesh*]” (Genesis 2:7), or read God’s declaration that “the soul [*nephesh*] who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4).

That last verse is key to understanding the concept of a soul. If the soul were immortal, it would be impossible to say that sinning would produce death. Rather, if mainstream Christianity were correct in its doctrine of hell, Ezekiel 18:4 would have to say, “the soul who sins shall be condemned to eternal torment.” But this, along with the apostle Paul in Romans 6:23, plainly states that the penalty of sin is death, not never-ending fiery torment in hell. Ecclesiastes 9:5 tells us: “For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing”.

Leviticus 17:11 explains that “the life [*nephesh*] of the flesh is in the blood” and, as in the case of Jesus Christ, that lifeblood [*nephesh*/soul] can be poured out unto death (Isaiah 53:12). Given that the soul is capable of death, and taking into consideration the fact that the word translated “soul” is used in reference to all sorts of living creatures, we can only conclude that the soul spoken of in the Bible is a living being itself – not an eternal component of mankind.

Source of intellect

However, the Bible also teaches that there is a spirit in man which imparts aspects of the human mind, including self-awareness, intellect, creativity, personality, and temperament – everything that enables human accomplishment and knowledge short of true spiritual understanding (1 Corinthians 2:11).

Ecclesiastes 12:7 mentions this spirit, explaining that it returns to God upon death. Some erroneously inter-

pret this as a reference to righteous individuals going to heaven. However, the context shows this interpretation is incorrect. For one thing, it states that the spirit of everyone who dies, not just the righteous, goes back to God who gave it. The preceding verses speak of ageing and death taking their natural course in every person.

Upon death, the human body decomposes into the dust from which it was created and the spirit in man goes back to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7). If the spirit in man were the man himself, this verse would not make sense since it plainly says that the body decomposes. Is the spirit in man an immortal soul? No! The idea of an immortal soul came from ancient pagan religion; it is not in the Scriptures.

***“For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing”
(Ecclesiastes 9:5).***

Why would the spirit of man return to God upon death? Consider how God will resurrect the dead. He will not simply put life back into dead bodies. For even if the body remains intact upon death, the bodies of most people will no longer exist by the time of the resurrections. It is likely, therefore, that the spirit in man serves as the permanent record of every human being, by which God will resurrect him at the appointed time (1 Corinthians 15:23). By way of analogy, it’s possible to recreate a destroyed building if one has the blueprints of the original. Similarly, God can recreate a person by the record preserved in the spirit in man.

Death is likened to sleep, indicating that the spirit has no consciousness apart from a living body (Daniel 12:12; John 11:11-15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15). Paul wrote that the righteous dead wait in their graves until the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18). Since Christ comes to the earth to reign, the resurrected saints will also be on earth with Him. Heaven isn’t the reward of Christians.

Our booklets *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, *Why Were You Born?* and *What Happens After Death?* explain more. These can be downloaded from www.ucg.org or requested from the address at the bottom of the front page.



Q I've just started reading your publication *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* and have been put off by what seems a fundamental error on page 4. It states, referring to Jesus, that He was raised from the dead three days and three nights later. I was always under the impression that He died on a Friday and was raised on Sunday with Friday night and Saturday night in between, hence two nights. For Jesus to have been dead for three nights He would have been raised on the Monday.

Question from the Internet

A You are correct in that we cannot count three days and three nights between Friday and Sunday. Furthermore, when asked for a sign that He was the Messiah, Jesus Himself told us, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (Matthew 12:39-40).

If Jesus were not dead and buried for this period of time, then there is no proof that He is the Messiah and we don't have a Saviour. If you continue reading *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* you will find a full explanation and biblically based timeline of this, including a chronology of crucifixion week on page 41 of the booklet.

The choice of a Sunday date for Easter is based on the assumption that Christ rose from the grave early on a Sunday morning. The popular erroneous belief is that Christ was crucified on a Friday and rose on a Sunday, but neither of these suppositions is true. A close inspection of the biblical text makes that quite clear.

Some believe that Christ's "three days and three nights" statement does not require a literal span of 72 hours, reasoning that a part of a day can be reckoned as a whole day. Thus, since Jesus died in the afternoon, they think the remainder of Friday constituted the first day, Saturday the second and part of Sunday the third. Howev-

er, only two nights – Friday night and Saturday night – are accounted for in this explanation. Something is obviously wrong with the traditional view regarding when Christ was in the tomb.

Jonah 1:17, to which Christ referred, states specifically that "Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." We have no basis for thinking that Jesus meant only two nights and one day, plus parts of two days. If Jesus were in the tomb only from late Friday afternoon to early Sunday morning, then the sign He gave that He was the prophesied Messiah was not fulfilled.

By comparing details in both Gospels – where Mark tells us the women bought spices after the Sabbath and Luke relates that they prepared the spices before resting on the Sabbath – we can clearly see that two different Sabbaths are mentioned. The first, as John 19:31 tells us, was a "high day" – the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread – which, in A.D. 31, fell on a Thursday. The second was the weekly seventh-day Sabbath.

After the women rested on the regular weekly Sabbath, they went to Jesus' tomb early on the first day of the week (Sunday), "while it was still dark" (John 20:1), and found that He had already been resurrected (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:1-3).

When we consider the details in all four Gospel accounts, the picture is clear. Jesus was crucified and entombed late on Wednesday afternoon, just before a Sabbath began at sunset. However, that Sabbath was a high-day, lasting from Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset that week, rather than the regular weekly Sabbath, lasting from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

We can be assured that the length of His entombment that Jesus gave as proof He was the Messiah was exactly as long as He foretold. Jesus rose precisely three days and three nights after He was placed in the tomb.

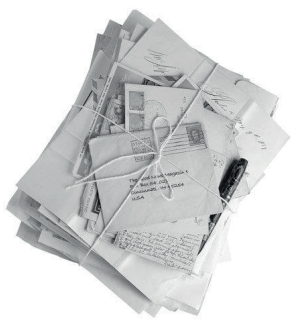
Let the Bible answer...

What does the Bible teach about accusing, judging or criticising others?

Whilst we can assess that another's actions are sinful we are not to speak evil of anyone: Acts 23:5; Titus 3:2; 2 Peter 2:10-12. What we say should be gracious: Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:8-10.

Only God can judge another's heart and motives: Psalm 44:20-21; Ecclesiastes 3:17; Jeremiah 17:10.

Anyone accused should have the right of reply: Proverbs 18:17; Mark 15:4.



Letters From Our Readers

After death, then what?

I acknowledge as a Christian that we will remain in our grave/urn until Christ's return. However does our soul on our death go straight to heaven?

Reader in Colchester

Editor's comment: No, souls do not go to heaven. To explain more, we have sent you our booklet What Happens After Death? You may also find the articles on pages 2 and 6 of this Supplement helpful.

More about Christ

I would like to receive more information about our Lord and Saviour. I am blessed to receive your booklets.

Reader in Nottingham

I would like to receive anything you have on Jesus Christ. I would like help to study more about Jesus.

Reader in Reading

Editor's comment: Copies of our booklet Jesus Christ: The Real Story

are in the post to you. We hope you find them helpful. A full list of our booklets is available at www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets

Helpful materials

Can you please send me *Beyond Today* for good. I'm so impressed by it. Also *The Ten Commandments* booklet. I believe the Ten Commandments are the foundation and centre of Christian instruction and way of living.

I also read your booklet *Tools for Spiritual Growth*. I got it from a friend. Again I was very impressed.

Reader in the Republic of Ireland

The materials you are sending me are helping me to get to know more about the Bible.

Reader in Chesterfield

I am always enriched by every issue.

Reader in Wolverhampton

Appreciation

I appreciate the time and effort

that go into collating your magazine and Supplement. They are truly a source of spiritual enlightenment.

Reader in Montrose

Thank you for sending *Beyond Today* magazine. I look forward to reading them and the many historical facts printed in them.

Reader in Gillingham

I think we are seeing more signs of the end times. *Beyond Today* is a truly inspiring read and gives a clear indication of our position as Christians and the future.

Reader in Hayle

I love reading all your magazines. They give me hope and faith.

Reader in South Wales

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

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Jesus Christ instructed His disciples that as they had freely received they were to freely give (Matthew

10:8), so we supply our literature free of charge, making Christ's message available to all. Our gratitude goes to those who assist financially in this aspect of the Church's work.

Donations may be sent to *Beyond Today* or United Church of God, PO Box 705, Watford WD19 6FZ, United Kingdom; or online at www.ucg.org.uk/donate.html through PayPal. Donations can also be made directly to our bank account. Please contact us for details.

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