

STRAIGHT PATHS

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"...and make straight paths for your feet..." Hebrews 12:13

EDITORIAL

It is no secret that following Christ is not for those who love laziness. The Lord Jesus spoke of taking up one's cross and denying oneself. The Lord was not commanding austerity for its own sake but informing us that we God's purposes for us may require us to forego our desires. Framing it positively, God desires many things for us that we won't desire in our fleshly state. But when we have seen the infinite worth of God, expressed in the person of His Son, we are motivated to surrender all to Him and cooperate with Him as he seeks to transform us. "Be diligent," says Peter, "and add to your faith virtue..."

In keeping with this principle, in this issue of Straight Paths, we meditate on Paul's instructions to Timothy on what to flee and what to pursue. In the Holy Bible section, we see that much diligence was needed to translate the Bible and there is much work yet to be done. Diligence is also needed in managing conflicts, as we learn in Life Issues. And in Apologetics, we learn that carbon dating has its merits but is prone to inaccuracies when dating remains from several thousand years ago. Mere human efforts would amount to nothing without God's intervention, and we see both in the making of the song "The Love of God" and the life of C. T. Studd, a missionary to China.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, may we all be diligent to progress in our walk with God!

Johnny Varghese

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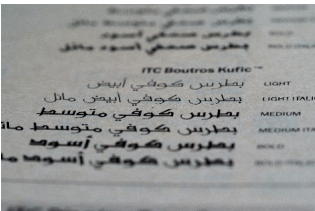


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STRAIGHT PATHS

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE - CARBON DATING

JOHNNY VARGHESE

This series of articles has taught us about the relationship between science and the Bible. We found that the Biblical worldview led to the birth of modern science in Europe about five centuries ago. We also learned that the scientific establishment gradually became materialist – believing that only natural processes can and should be evoked to explain everything we see. Inorganic and organic evolution theories were used to account for the origin of the universe and everything in it without the action of a Creator. In previous issues, we have learned that attempts to blend evolution with Genesis do not do justice to scripture and compromise the gospel. The disciple who wants to honor the Lord must take scripture at face value: God created everything in only six days, just about six thousand years ago.

However, the question remains: if the Bible (in its literal interpretation) is true, what of the secular scientific narrative which contradicts the Bible? Surely God’s word should agree with what we observe in God’s world! We take this up in this and the following articles. The secular scientific theories disagree with the Bible in terms of the processes and also time frames. For example, the Bible says (indirectly) that the earth is only a few thousand years old, while the secular consensus is that planet earth is nearly five billion years old, with animal fossils dated millions of years old. In this article, we critically examine the dating methods that scientists use to come to this conclusion. One such technique is carbon dating, invented by American chemist Willard Libby. Carbon occurs in several varieties (isotopes). The abundant, stable form is carbon-12. A much rarer form called carbon-14 is formed when charged particles from the sun (solar wind) strike nitrogen atoms in the atmosphere. Plants inhale carbon dioxide and thus ingest both carbon-12 and 14. Animals eat plants, and thus get both types of carbon. The C-14 decays, but the ingestion of the C-14 compensates for this. The C-14 to C-12 ratio in living things remains constant and equal to the corresponding ratio in the atmosphere. When an animal or plant dies (and ingestion ceases), its C-14 decays gradually to nitrogen (which escapes), while the C-12 remains as it is. Thus the C-14 to C-12 ratio decreases with time. We, therefore, have a “clock” that starts ticking the moment something dies. If we compare the C-14 to C-12 ratio in the remains of a dead animal to that in living things, we can estimate how long ago the animal died.

Plants inhale carbon dioxide and thus ingest both carbon-12 and 14. Animals eat plants, and thus get both types of carbon.

The “half-life” of C-14 is about 5,700 years. This means that half the original C-14 will be left after 5,700 years. After another 5,700 years, that is 11,400 years after the start, half of the above half, i.e., one-fourth of the original, will remain, and so on. In 50,000 years, hardly any C-14 will be left. Thus, carbon dating cannot give an age of millions of years. Any sample that contains C-14 must have an age of, at most, thousands of years. Carbon dating, however, does give dates like 20,000 or 30,000 years ago that conflict with the Biblical model of natural history. So what’s the problem with this method? Several tacit assumptions are hidden. Secular scientists acknowledge the difficulties some of these assumptions cause and try to factor them, but this involves further assumptions and unknowns. Let us understand some of the problems with carbon dating.

In its simplest form, the method assumes that the initial C-14/C-12 ratio in an animal that died long ago equals that of an animal that dies today. This is equivalent to assuming that the atmospheric conditions today are identical to those long ago. The rate of C-14 formation depends on the sun’s activity. If the sun were less active in the past, C-14 in the atmosphere would be less abundant than it is today, and hence plants and animals that died in the past would look older than they are today (and vice versa). No one knows the history of the sun’s activity for sure.

The rate of C-14 formation also depends on the earth’s passage through the magnetic gas clouds in our Milky Way galaxy. The earth’s magnetic field diverts the solar wind and thus affects the formation of C-14. The earth’s field has reversed itself many times in the past with an overall trend of decaying. All this complicates carbon dating. The overall decay implies more C-14 is produced now than in the past; thus, things will appear older than they are.

During Noah’s Flood (which secular scientists don’t believe ever happened), vast amounts of plant and animal remains were suddenly buried. Decaying vegetation typically releases carbon (12 and 14) into the atmosphere. But this would not happen in the world immediately after the flood, although the nitrogen in the atmosphere would still produce C-14. Thus, the C-14/C-12 ratio would become higher after the flood. This means the C-12/C-14 ratio before the flood would have been lower than today. Hence, animals that died during or before Noah’s Flood will appear older than they really are. The flood was triggered by “fountains of the great deep broken up” (Genesis 7:11). This suggests large-scale volcanic action. Volcanoes spew large amounts of C-12 (but not C-14) into the atmosphere. This further means that animals dying during the flood would have been killed with depleted levels of C-14 – this would also cause them to appear older than they are today.

Drastic changes in the conditions relevant for carbon dating are likely to have occurred only during Creation Week, Noah’s Flood, and shortly after. Thus, carbon dating is expected to be reliable for dates up to about four thousand years ago, mainly when historical records also support it. This article does not purport to discredit the forensic scientist who examines smuggled ivory to determine when the elephants died or the historian trying to date a medieval manuscript.

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Interestingly, secular scientists acknowledge two recent factors that can muddle carbon dating:

1. The large-scale burning of fossil fuels since the dawn of the industrial era. Their carbon is depleted in C-14, so things dying today tend to appear older than they are.
2. Nuclear tests during the twentieth century released large amounts of C-14 into the atmosphere and, therefore, would tend to make remains appear younger than they are.

Apart from these recent factors, secular scientists assume that “all things continue as they were from the beginning” (2 Peter 3:5). These are unproven assumptions that contradict the Bible’s narrative of creation and flood. Thus, to disprove the Bible using carbon dating requires one to begin with the assumption that the Bible is false (i.e., there was no creation and no flood).

Secular scientists try to assure themselves of the reliability of one dating method by correlating it with another. For example, here’s a quote from a web article titled “Answers to creationist attacks on carbon dating” by the National Center for Science Education (USA).

There are two ways of dating wood from bristlecone pines: one can count rings or radiocarbon-date the wood. Since the tree ring counts have reliably dated some wood specimens back to 6200 BC, one can check out the C-14 dates against the tree ring-count dates.

Tree-ring dating is based on the principle that a ring gets added to a tree trunk once every year. Notice the words “...have reliably dated some specimens of wood back to 6200 BC”. No, they haven’t. No one has traveled back to 6200 BC to verify that the assumption behind tree-ring dating was valid during the traumatic times just after Noah’s Flood.

Thus, carbon dating and other methods constitute a game of circular reasoning: different techniques prop up others to produce a story, which is presented as proven natural history. Therefore, carbon dating is no valid reason to abandon or force-fit the Bible with the secular account of natural history.

carbon dating and other methods constitute a game of circular reasoning: different techniques prop up others to produce a story, which is presented as proven natural history.

The Lord said, “Go ye into the whole world and teach all nations.” God’s mission is for the whole world. So then, the Word of God must be available in the languages of all the world’s people. Ethnologue, an online publication, reports that there are 7151 living languages in the world now. According to another online resource, the complete Bible is available in 724 languages. The New Testament, in some cases, with certain portions of the Old Testament, is available in 1617 languages. Some parts of the Bible are available in 1248 languages. Further, the same source reports that at least some portion of the scripture is available in 3589 languages. In about 964 languages, initial works in translation are progressing.¹ Though the data is quite encouraging, with about 97% of the world population having some Bible portion in their language, the work is unfinished.

A translation may be defined as the rendering of a given composition from one language into another. It has always been integral to God’s mission. Therefore, an understanding and appreciation of the history of translations of the Bible are essential.

The Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible is the Jewish scriptures. There is evidence that the scribes were making oral paraphrases of the Hebrew scriptures into the Aramaic language right from the time of Ezra (Neh. 8:1-8). These paraphrases were not strictly translations but aided in understanding the archaic language forms of the Torah. By the close of the last centuries before Christ, this gradual process had continued until almost every book in the Hebrew Bible had its oral paraphrase or interpretation (Targum). During the early centuries after Christ, these Targums were committed to writing.

After the death of Alexander the Great, the Ptolemies ruled Egypt. Ptolemy I was governor of Egypt from 323 to 305 BC, after which he became king and reigned until he died in 285 BC. He was succeeded by his son Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 BC). During his rule, the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek. This version was called Septuagint (LXX), which means seventy, indicating the number of scribes involved in its translation. N. Geisler and Nix say that the term “Septuagint” applies strictly to the Pentateuch, which was probably the only portion of the Old Testament translated during the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Further, they said, “The Jews might have gone on at a later time to authorize a standard text of the rest of the Septuagint.”² But as the LXX grew in significance to the Christians, the Jews lost interest in it. For this reason, other, more accurate translations were done later.

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Early Christian Era

The first translation of the Scriptures in the Christian era was into Syriac around 170 AD.³ It is noteworthy that Syriac was the language of Damascus, where Paul went to persecute Christians. After that, the Bible translation activity spread out from Syria over the following centuries into Armenia, Georgia, Samarkand, and beyond.

Around 382 AD, Jerome undertook to produce a new translation in Latin. In addition, he studied Hebrew and Greek and could access Scripture texts in both these languages. The resulting translation, produced in Latin, is known as the Vulgate.

The Middle Ages

“Though the Middle Ages were difficult, the spread of the word of God through translations continued. It was, surely, the time when Islamic expansion caused the Church to go into lockdown mode and look inwards. And yet this was the time of Cyril and Methodius, missionaries and Bible translators for the Slavs. There was also impressive activity in translating Scripture passages into Arabic in Seville, Baghdad, and Damascus. We also know that Bede translated John’s Gospel into Old English. Peter Waldo did similar things in France.”

John Wycliffe, who emerged in 14th century England as a high-profile proponent of the scriptures for the general public, translated the Scriptures from the Latin Vulgate into English for the ordinary people. Wycliffe was excommunicated. So after his death, his body was exhumed and burnt. But unlike those before him, Wycliffe had an effect that rippled across Europe. Jan Hus and others in Prague produced Scriptures in Hungarian and Bohemian. Hus was declared a heretic and promptly burnt at the stake.

Two events in the 15th century changed the course of Bible translation. Firstly, Gutenberg’s development of the printing press and then the fall of Constantinople in 1453 AD. Knowledge and access to the Greek and Hebrew texts had dried up in the Western Church. The Eastern Church kept this ancient knowledge, so when Constantinople fell, scholars fled westward, clutching their Greek and Hebrew texts. They ended up in Paris, London, and Rotterdam. It was Erasmus of Rotterdam who produced an edition of the Greek text of the New Testament in 1516 AD.

Printing Bibles created entirely new distribution possibilities and having the Greek text available meant translation was far more accurate. Combine these two factors with the growing desire aroused by men like Wycliffe to read the Scriptures for oneself, and you can see how the Bible translation scene was altered. By 1600 AD, printed versions of the entire Bible had appeared in 15 European languages.

William Tyndale’s translation of the Bible into English in the 1530s stands out for English speakers. This is because he coined so many expressions that communicated powerfully. The King James Version, published in 1611, retained much of Tyndale’s groundbreaking work.

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Recent Developments

The pace of Bible translation slackened in the two centuries following but found a spurt without much wait. This was along with the growth of missions around the coasts of Africa and India. It picked up again in the first part of the 19th century. Henry Martyn, who died in Armenia at age 31, had translated the New Testament into three languages! William Carey’s efforts saw translation work in 40 languages. “By 1880, Yoruba-speaking Anglican Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther had become the first African mother-tongue translator.”

Women also entered the Bible translation work. Pandita Ramabai, a high-caste Indian convert to Christianity, provides a remarkable example. At 24, she found herself destitute: an impoverished, orphaned widow. Nevertheless, she studied Greek and Hebrew to translate the Scriptures into Marathi and completed her translation just before her death in 1922. There were other women also who gave their lives to this service.

Today, the whole Bible has been translated into more than 700 different languages, and with over 2,500 active translation projects in progress, the Bible translation movement is stronger than ever.

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CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Human relationships are complex. Much effort is required to maintain harmony in a relationship. No one has ever claimed that their relationships run on autopilot. Conflicts are everywhere, whether it's our workplace, society, church, or family. With the fallen nature of man, conflicts are inevitable. However, some disputes can be healthy and hence, constructive as well. But conflicts will lead to destruction and chaos if not dealt with correctly. It is God's divine purpose for man to dwell in relationships. The Bible reminds us, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Rom. 12:18). Furthermore, God is delighted in the harmony of human relationships, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Ps.133:1). Our effectiveness in serving God depends on how well we relate to others.

Unfortunately, we live in an age when relationships are not looked at through God's purposes. We call it quits for silly reasons. Research suggests that most relationships are broken and shattered due to poor management of conflicts. Therefore, a child of God must learn how to manage disputes biblically. We can only experience healthy, close relationships when we manage conflicts well. Following is a list of Dos and don'ts of conflict management.

We can only experience healthy, close relationships when we manage conflicts well.

DO's

1. Take it to the Lord first - We must ask God to help us understand the problem and show us where we are wrong. Most often, we are unable to see the problem with us. We usually start with the assumption that others are wrong and that we are right. Therefore, it is important to check ourselves in the light of God's word before we address an issue (Matt.7:3-5). Dealing with a conflict without thinking through and praying enough could be dangerous!
2. Deal with conflicts - Silence is the usual response during many conflicts. We stop talking to people who have wronged us. But we need to understand that disputes generate anger and bitterness inside us. It's a Biblical imperative to handle anger effectively (Eph.4:26). Thus, we must deal with conflicts as soon as possible. But before we do that, think about the following:
 - a. If it's just a one-time incident, learn to forgive and let go (Pro.19:11, Col.3:13).
 - b. If it's an ongoing offense hurting you or others, address it as soon as possible (Pro.27:5-6).
3. Keep it to the present - As we prayerfully decide on resolving the conflict, we must keep our intensity low and stick to the present issues. There's no gain in digging out old problems; instead, they would add flame to the fire. Talk about the current situation (Pro.17:9).
4. Concentrate on one issue - To avoid unnecessary strife, make sure you know what is bothering you (Pro.20:3). Often, we make the mistake of bringing too many issues at once to the table. Trying to resolve too many problems in one go will not resolve even one case. Secondly, we should be careful to avoid bringing up unrelated issues. One can expect a quarrel when one discusses multiple problems in one sitting.
5. Use "I" statements - Observe Paul's statements in 2 Cor. 2:1-4. Rather than beating around the bush, he clearly expresses his disagreements. Similarly, rather than blaming or attacking people, we must learn to express our feelings or thoughts about the issue. For example, it's better to say, "I feel disappointed that we disagree on this," rather than saying, "why do you always disagree with me?"
6. Express feelings appropriately - Be careful that your words don't crush the other person's spirit (Pro.18:14). If the other person uses hurtful language, mention it immediately. Keeping a check on our language and attitude when we put effort into resolving a conflict is vital.

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DONT's

1. Don't attack each other's character - Talk about the behavior rather than the personality (Proverbs 11:12). We must construct our sentences in a way that does not attack a person's character.
2. Don't try mind reading - Don't try to analyze each other's motives and thoughts. It's easy to think we understand the 'why' behind another person's point of view, but we do not have the right to condemn them (Pro.20:5).
3. Don't make prophecies - We must not pass any judgment on others. Don't predict how someone will react in actions, thoughts, and feelings (Ecclesiastes 10:14). We must make room for others to realize and correct their actions/behavior.
4. Don't counterattack - Be willing to discuss the issues without referencing each other's failures and weaknesses. It's essential to listen to each other as they express their feelings. Then, we must work together to find a solution (1 Pe.3:8-11).
5. Don't try to win - Any attempt to win the discussion at the expense of others destroys our unity in Christ. A desire to win usually means getting the best of the other person (Phil.2:4). Our ultimate objective is to restore the relationship, and we must be ready to make all the efforts to achieve that purpose.
6. Don't dump your problems - We must not share our conflicts to gain sympathy or to put down others (Pro.20:19). Secretly telling a friend about someone not only betrays the person but also makes us more resentful. We surely can take wise counsel from a close friend, but we must be careful of our motive!

Step by Step strategy for conflict management

1. Take the issue to God
2. Bring up the issue
3. Explain the conflict
4. Propose a tentative solution
5. Listen to the response of the other person
6. Take some time to resolve, if needed
7. If there is any anger, ask forgiveness from each other

Remember that no one formula fits every conflict management. Every situation is different, and we must pray to the Lord for wisdom to handle each situation wisely. Keeping the conflicts unresolved will not let us walk in the joy of Christ. May the Lord help us to manage our conflicts well.

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“BUT YOU TIMOTHY”

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM

Paul was mindful of the state of his young companions. He cared for the timid young Timothy very much. After his first Roman imprisonment in about AD 63, he traveled with Timothy to Ephesus, one of the major cities in Asia Minor. Paul left Timothy to complete some duties in his local assembly and went to Macedonia. There he remembered young Timothy amidst many responsibilities he might find difficult to fulfill. He needed guidance. Thus, Paul gives the necessary instructions. These instructions are suitable for anyone who would love life and its profitability.

The letter, known to us as 1st Timothy, is full of needed instructions for young Timothy. Here we shall only look at the concluding counsel Paul gives. He says, “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called, and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Tim 6: 11-14. This passage gives the following practical instructions.

Flee these things

Paul says, “But you, O man of God, flee these things.” The immediate context refers to fleeing the love for money. The passage instructs us to divert ourselves from covetousness. The general idea around us is that wealth determines one’s worth. But the fact is that the rich have more temptations and cares. If not handled well, wealth can play havoc in life. Money should be in the purse, not the heart. When it takes residence in a man’s heart rather than becoming a means of service, it turns us into its servant. The pursuit of money upsets our priorities. Instead of pursuing money, let it pursue us. Many young people think that the means of self-actualization and respect is to be rich. But money provides neither self-actualization nor regard from God. Paul instructs us that we should be content if our basic needs are met. Anything more that we receive legitimately is just a bonus added!

Follow good virtues

Paul says, “Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.” There are six virtues mentioned that we need to pursue. The righteousness mentioned here is practical righteousness. This comes only from a right relationship with God, being justified. Godliness is having the nature of God radiated through us. Faith, here, means being faithful; love must be seen in action; patience is in relationships and suffering; gentleness is seen in kindness. Having these virtues is being good. Jesus Christ has the fullness of all these virtues. Thus, pursuing and possessing these makes one Christlike.

Fight the fight of faith.

‘Faith’ here means ‘the faith delivered once for all to the saints,’ the word of God. There is a fight we have to wage for its sanctity. We must guard it against any pollution. Elsewhere, Paul said to Timothy, “O Timothy, guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babbling and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge” 1 Timothy 6: 20. Peter also says similarly, “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” 1 Peter 3:15. This is a bounden duty of all believers.

Fasten (hold on) to life

Fastening to life doesn’t mean we could lose our eternal life if we don’t hold on to life. It only means that eternal life must be made experiential. It should become evident to others. Eternal life is God’s life in us, received at the very moment we believed in the Lord Jesus. Once we have become possessors of eternal life by being born again, we are forever children of God. No one can disannul it. However, the experience of abundant life must become a reality.

Paul provides essential encouragement for Timothy to keep these instructions. Firstly, he encourages us from his past experiences. He had “confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” Paul is probably referring to some event where Timothy stood for the Lord in the face of peril. Secondly, he reminds him of the power of God. He says, “I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things.” This shows that God can empower timid Timothy for any essentials or eventuality.

Further, even if the ultimate happens, God can raise him. Thirdly, Paul reminds him of the pattern of the Lord Jesus by saying, “Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate.” Paul meant that Timothy also should follow suit. Lastly, Paul also tells Timothy about the promise of the Lord’s coming; until then, Timothy is urged to be faithful. These are matters of encouragement for all to be faithful.

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C. T. STUDD

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM

Charles Thomas Studd (C.T. Studd) was born in England on December 6, 1860. His family was wealthy, and he studied at Eton (an elite British school) and Cambridge University. Cricket was a passion he developed during his high school days. In college, he became the captain of the Cambridge cricket team. As a result, some people have called him the Michael Jordan of cricket. But his cricketing achievements are just a footnote compared to what has marked C.T. Studd's life in history.

In 1877, Charles' father, Edward Studd, was saved while attending a meeting that the American evangelist D. L. Moody had organized. He became concerned about the salvation of his sons and would try his best to ask them about their souls. But Charles and his brother tried their best to avoid their father's questions.

On some occasions, Edward would have revival preachers over and host meetings in the house. He hoped that C.T. and the two other boys would receive Christ. One by one, the revival preachers came, yet nothing seemed to change in the boys' lives. Edward was unsatisfied since there was no sign of transformation in his boys' lives.

One day in 1878, Edward hosted a preacher in his house. While C.T., 18 yrs of age, was on his way to play cricket, the preacher approached him and talked with him. C.T., however, did not want to speak. The preacher asked him, "Are you a Christian?" C.T. said yes, hoping to get rid of the preacher. But C. T.'s answer was not convincing enough. So, the preacher inquired if C.T. believed he would obtain eternal life when he died, and C.T. was stunned. He had no answer. He was living for himself and thought nothing would happen after he died. C. T. tells what happened as he acknowledged God's gift of eternal life received through faith in Christ: "I got down on my knees, and I did say thank you to God. And right then, I received joy and peace in my soul. I knew then what it was to be 'born again,' and the Bible, which had been so dry to me earlier, became alive." His two brothers also got saved the same day after the preacher explained about Jesus and what He did on the cross.

However, instead of telling others about the love of Christ, C.T. was selfish and kept the knowledge to himself. As a result, his passion for God gradually grew cold, and the love of the world began to creep in. After that, C.T. spent six years in that unhappy, backslidden state. However, the Lord, in His goodness, worked in his life. In November 1883, his younger brother George got very sick to death. As C.T. watched his brother's condition in horror and grief at his brother's suffering, he reflected, "what is all the popularity of the world to George? What is all the fame and flattering? What is it worth to possess the world's riches when a man comes to face Eternity?" Around this time, C.T. went to hear D. L. Moody speak, and the Lord met C. T. again and restored the joy of His salvation. To the family's utter surprise, God miraculously healed his brother George, and C.T. was changed so dramatically through this event that he consecrated himself to the Lord's work. Soon, the things of this world were no longer worthy of his life, and Studd began to invest in eternal things. About this time, he read a pamphlet from an atheist. The atheist claimed that if he believed in what Christians preached, he would do anything in his might to reach out to as many as possible. This inspired C.T. to reach out to others with the good news.

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C.T. Studd became part of a group of athletes at Cambridge who met together for Bible study and prayer. They were beginning to devote themselves to prayer and the world's evangelization. Starting at their campus, they began sharing their faith openly and telling everyone about salvation in Jesus Christ alone. As a result, many were won to Christ because of Studd's influence among other collegians. During this time, an influential missionary, Hudson Taylor, began to challenge the students of England to join him in reaching the millions of perishing souls in China. Taylor's high calling and deep passion for China captured the hearts of these young men at Cambridge. There was a discussion on joining Hudson's mission agency and pioneering the unreached parts of China with the Gospel.

Despite a promising career in cricket and the life of comfort he had grown up in, C.T. was determined to follow God's heart for the world and join Him in reaching China. Studd's decision to go to China influenced the other seven men at Cambridge to live for God's glory and devote themselves to China. Stanley Smith, Montague Beauchamp, and William Cassels from the rowing team at Trinity joined Studd. Two students, Dixon Hoste and Arthur Polhill-Turner were officers who also left their promising careers in the military to join Studd. Soon, Cecil Polhill-Turner., who was from C.T. Studd's cricket team, joined him.

Studd faced much opposition as well. Studd's father, Edward, passed away, causing the family to put pressure on Studd not to leave his widowed mother at such a time. His older brother tried to talk him out of going, and C.T. quoted Micah 7:6, "a man's enemies are the men of his own house." C. T. seeking to comfort his mother, wrote: "Mother dear, I do pray God to show you that it is such a privilege to give up a child to be used by God to save sinners who have never even heard of the name of Jesus."

Before going to China, Hudson organized a tour of the college campuses in England, allowing the "Cambridge Seven," as they came to be known, to share their testimonies and challenge students to consecrate their lives to the glory of God. Through these months of traveling and speaking, God drew people to faith in Christ and awakened the church to His global cause. The Cambridge Seven left for China in 1885. They adopted the traditional Chinese dress as soon as they got there. C.T. went around the country and preached the Gospel in evangelistic meetings. He met with much success, and many people gave their lives to the Lord.

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While in China, C. T. reached the age (of 25) at which he was to inherit a large sum of money according to his father's will. Through reading God's Word and much prayer, C. T. felt led to give his entire fortune to Christ! He was not a fool to take this plunge. It was his public testimony before God and man that he believed God's Word to be the surest thing on earth and that the hundredfold interest which God has promised in this life, not to speak of the next, is an actual reality for those who believe it and act on it. Before knowing the exact amount of his inheritance, C.T. sent £5000 to Mr. Moody, another £5000 to George Müller (£4000 to be used on missionary work and £1000 among the orphans), as well as 15,000 pounds to support other worthy ministries. In a few months, he discovered the exact amount of his inheritance, and he gave some additional thousands away, leaving about £3400 in his possession. He gave most of the money away. Three years after going to China, C.T. married Priscilla. He was going to allot the remaining inheritance to Priscilla, but she rebuked C.T. Priscilla Livingstone Stewart said, "Charlie, what did the Lord tell the rich young man to do?" "Sell all." "Well then, we will start clear with the Lord at our wedding." So they gave the rest away to mission work.

They served the Lord in inland China through many perils and hardships until, in 1894, after ten years in China, ill health forced the Studds to return to England. He was later invited to speak in America to the Student Volunteer Movement led by his brother. The Student Volunteer Movement was a group to recruit students to go on missions after college. In the last meeting of the tour, C.T. Studd challenged the students, "Are you living for the day, or are you living for life eternal? Are you going to care for the opinion of men here or the opinion of God? The opinion of men won't avail much when we appear before the judgment throne. But the opinion of God will. Should we not, then, better take His word and implicitly obey it?" Authenticity marked the power of the message of these seven who were on their way to the unreached. C.T. Studd admitted, "Had I cared for people's comments, I should never have been a missionary." After calling students to obey the Great Commission, the Cambridge Seven left for China, arriving in Shanghai on March 18, 1885.

In 1900, C.T. went to South India, where he became a pastor in Ootacamund for six years. During his time there, he saw three conversions a week among British officials and villagers. C.T. preached in India until 1906, when he returned home. First China, then India, and now the heart of Africa. C. T. saw the need to pioneer work in Central Africa as a missionary after they returned to England in 1906, and this stirred him up. But again, the path was not without obstacles. Penniless, turned down by the doctor, dropped by a Committee of businessmen who had agreed to support him, yet told by God to go, once more, C. T. staked everything to obey God. As a young man, he had risked his career in China; he gave up his fortune, and his very own life was at stake. His answer to the Committee was, "Gentlemen, God has called me to go, and I will go. I will blaze the trail, though my grave may only become a stepping stone that younger men may follow." Leaving his wife and four daughters in England, C. T. sailed, contrary to medical advice, for the heart of Africa in 1910. After a while, C.T.'s wife became seriously ill, forcing him to return to England. After she recovered in 1916, C.T. returned to the Congo. In 1928, Priscilla visited the Congo to see the work there. A year after this, she died. C. T continued to work there until he died in 1931.

C. T. bore much fruit for the Saviour while in Africa as he endured weakness and sickness, losing most of his teeth and suffering several heart attacks, but he endured hardship as a good soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ!

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C. T. bore much fruit for the Saviour while in Africa as he endured weakness and sickness, losing most of his teeth and suffering several heart attacks

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In a letter home, C. T. looking back on the outstanding events of his life, wrote: "As I believe I am now nearing my departure from this world, I have but a few things to rejoice in; they are these:

1. That God called me to China, and I went despite utmost opposition from all my loved ones.
2. That I joyfully acted as Christ told that rich young man to act.
3. That I, at the call of God, when alone on the Bibby liner in 1910, deliberately gave up my life for this work, which was not for Sudan only but for the unreached world.

Therefore, my only joy is that when God gave me work to do, I have not refused it."

C. T. Studd's life stands as some rugged Gibraltar—a sign to all succeeding generations that it is worthwhile to lose all this world can offer and stake everything in the world to come. His life will be an eternal rebuke to easy-going Christianity. He has demonstrated what it means to follow Christ without counting the cost or looking back.



Stanzas 1 and 2 and the tune (Lehman) of this beautiful hymn were composed by Frederick Martin Lehman, born on August 7, 1868, at Mecklenburg in Germany. At four, his family emigrated to the United States of America. They settled in Iowa, where Frederick M. Lehman spent most of his life. Studying for the ministry at Northwestern College in Naperville, IL, he became a Nazarene minister and served churches in Audubon, IA, and New London, IN. However, the majority of his life was devoted to writing sacred songs. While living in Iowa in 1898, he first produced those songs. In 1911, he moved to Kansas City, MO, where he helped to found the Nazarene Publishing House.



Frederick M. Lehman

This hymn came after a challenging time in Lehman's life. After some of his business deals had gone sour, he lost his business and began packing oranges and lemons on a farm. Sometime around 1917, Lehman, preparing to relocate to California, was at a camp meeting in a Midwestern state and heard a sermon on the love of God. His heart was so full of thoughts of the love of God when he went home that he could not sleep.

When he returned to continue packing oranges in containers the following day, his thoughts took the shape of the lyrics to a song. He wrote the lyrics on crates and scrap paper, using anything he could find – it was so important to the author that he had to write this song. Within a brief period, he produced two verses and a melody (which is now named Lehman in his honor), but Mr. Lehman felt the need to create at least one more verse to complete the song.

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His heart was so full of thoughts of the love of God when he went home that he could not sleep.
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He then remembered a poem that someone had given him. It consisted of words that were found two hundred years before his time, scratched on the walls of a mental asylum. Sitting at his piano, he found that the words fit his melody perfectly well, to his surprise and delight.

In later years, one Alfred Smith found that the words on the asylum wall were taken from a Hebrew poem, Hadamut, written in about the year 1000 AD by Meir Ben Issac Nehoria, a Jewish Rabbi. Although this Rabbi did not accept the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, he had a profound sense of the love of God from his reading of the Old Testament. In God's providence, this poem was translated into English (a language that did not exist when the poem was written) and scratched on the asylum wall by a troubled soul (and copied down by painters whose job was to repaint the asylum walls!) “The Love of God” first appeared in Volume Two of Lehman's series Songs that are different in 1919, although the copyright was obtained two years earlier. The third stanza's translation was done in 1917 by Joseph H. Hertz. Lehman's daughter, Claudia F. Lehman Mays provided the music's harmonization. She was also associated with the Nazarene Publishing House as its secretary for some time. Lehman left his account concerning the writing of this hymn in a 1948 pamphlet entitled “History of the Song, The Love of God.”

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THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS FOR YOU!

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM

The gospel account of Mathew records the story of a few 'Wise Men' who traveled from the east to Jerusalem. These wise men were a particular class of priests in the Persian Empire that had been around for a long time. They were religious teachers, philosophers, and scholars who were highly educated in many fields, including religion, astronomy, and astrology. They were aware of the old prophets and their prophecy regarding the coming King, the Savior of the world – Jesus Christ. A star in the sky led them to where the King was born. As they entered the house, they saw Jesus as a baby with His mother, Mary, and rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. They fell and worshipped Him. Then they took out their treasure and offered gold and frankincense, and myrrh as gifts. These were precious substances in those days and signified their reverence and devotion to the newly-born King.

Out of the three gifts they offered, myrrh was the odd one out. Gold is a precious metal used for jewelry, ornaments, currency, and idols throughout human history. Frankincense is an expensive fragrance made out of select trees. But myrrh, though being a costly substance made from rare thorn bushes, was used as an antiseptic, anointing oil, and embalming fluid. One can quickly identify the significance of offering gifts like gold and frankincense to a king, but myrrh has no association with the royal status of a king. So what were these wise men thinking? Or did it have anything to do with the newborn King in the little town of Bethlehem?

The first-century Jews were eagerly waiting for a messiah king who would free them from the atrocities of the Roman empire and establish his kingdom. The news about the birth of Jesus spread like wildfire, and even the ruling King Herod was afraid of this newborn King. He even plotted to kill Jesus but failed miserably. Jesus grew up, and all four gospels narrate the account of His public life. He proclaimed a message of peace and joy to the world. Jesus Christ spoke about establishing a kingdom of His heavenly father. He healed the sick and made the dead alive. His words and actions were unlike any king who intended to establish his kingdom; instead, He was meek and lowly. He washed the feet of His disciples. He walked and ate with those who were considered the least in society. The Jews and Pharisees started wondering what kind of King He was. Then He equated himself to God by calling Him father and claiming that He and the father are one.

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There was an uproar among the Jews and Pharisees against Him. They charged Him with blasphemy and demanded His arrest. Though the ruling Roman governor Pilate publicly pronounced that he didn't find Him guilty of any charge, He was sentenced to crucifixion. Before crucifying Him, they mocked Him, put a crown of thorns on His head, spat on Him, and beat Him. Then, they offered Him wine mixed with myrrh. There it was - the gift offering of the wise men. The messiah king gladly endured the experience of myrrh. Of all the gifts the wise men offered, the myrrh aptly represented the suffering and afflictions He would have to endure.

Jesus was not an ordinary king. He did not come to establish any kingdom on this earth. He came to establish His throne in the hearts of men and women. Today, He's got a gift to offer to anyone who believes in Him - the gift of salvation. Dear reader, this Christmas season, the greatest gift you can receive is the gift of salvation. Forgiveness from sins and an eternal life with God. Believe in Him, and you will be saved. Happy Christmas!

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Jesus was not an ordinary king. He did not come to establish any kingdom on this earth.

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Straight Paths is a bimonthly e-zine which exists to edify young believers in the Lord Jesus Christ in their Christian life, to help them apply Biblical principles in their daily lives, and to equip them to share their faith with others. It also exists to serve anyone else who may have an interest in the Bible.

STRAIGHT PATHS

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