

# STRAIGHT PATHS

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July - August, 2023

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

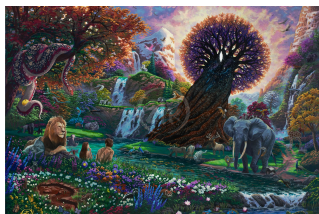
## EDITORIAL

*The last month has been difficult as we have learned of the horrifying atrocities in Manipur. Painful events force us to ask questions. Why are people so bad? What can motivate people to live peacefully with each other? What can motivate authorities to administer justice and maintain law and order? Is there any justice beyond that provided by human courts?*

*While God does not prevent people from doing wicked things, He answers the above questions in His word. We thus have great comfort. In this edition of Straight Paths, the things we learn throw some light on the above questions. In Apologetics, we learn that our very existence is proof that there is a God. the Bible specifically says that the Creator made humans in His own image. Believing this goes a long way in motivating humane behaviour. Beyond this, the gospel is a message of love that the world desperately needs. In the Holy Bible, Thomson B Thomas narrates the development of the English Bible. It is not an exaggeration to say that Manipur is an exception rather than the rule because of this book. In Discipleship and in the Devotion, we learn the life that the Lord Jesus offers and looks for in his disciples - these are the qualities that God uses to draw people to Him - make them better human beings. In Missions, we learn about John Sung, an epitome of these qualities. We hope that you will be much encouraged as you read these articles, as we have been in writing them.*

*Johnny Varghese*

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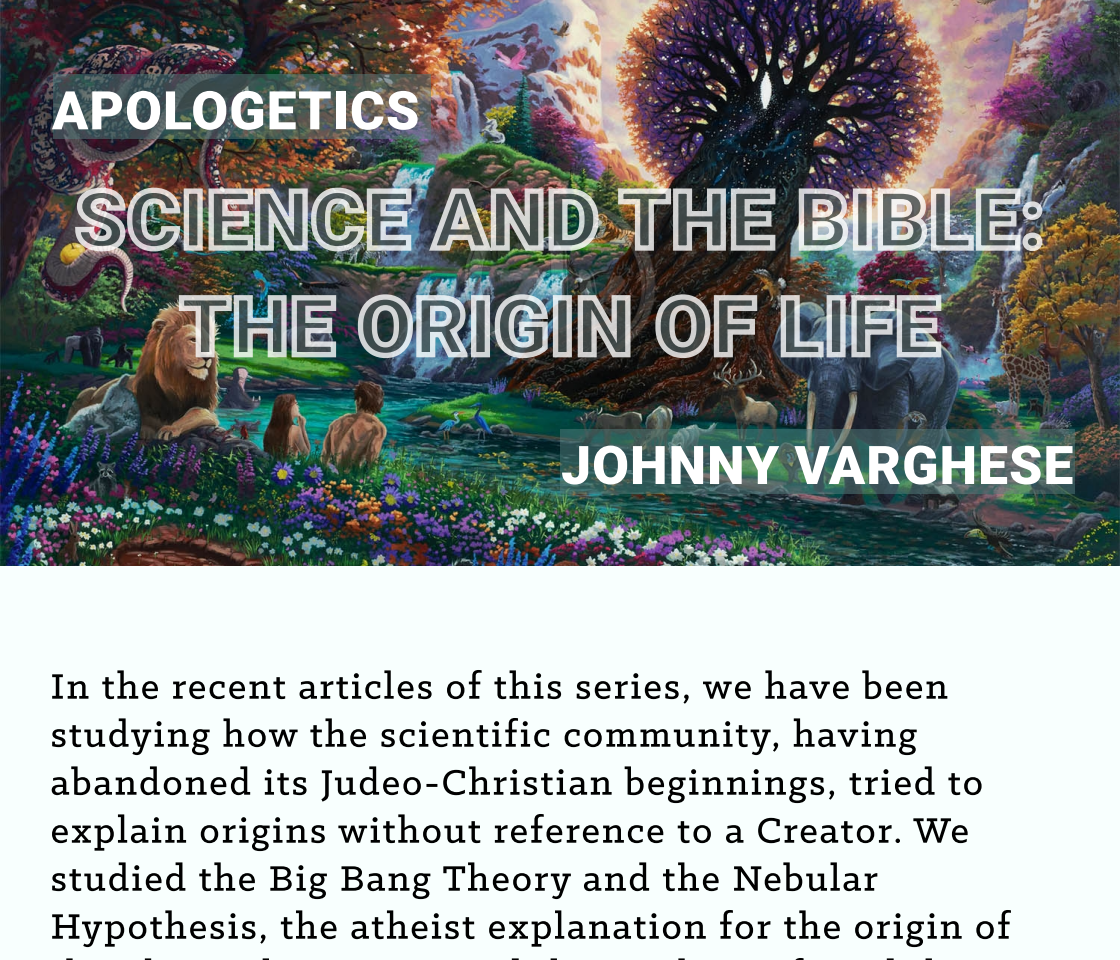
Straight Paths Team

The Gospel Is An Account Of True Love That Is Not Cheap.

For Private Circulation Only

**STRAIGHT PATHS**





In the recent articles of this series, we have been studying how the scientific community, having abandoned its Judeo-Christian beginnings, tried to explain origins without reference to a Creator. We studied the Big Bang Theory and the Nebular Hypothesis, the atheist explanation for the origin of the physical universe and the earth. We found that they disagreed with a vast array of observations. These theories are, therefore, no valid reason to refuse to believe Genesis. In this article, we examine atheistic theories for the origin of life.

In medieval and ancient times, it was commonly thought that living things spontaneously and typically emerge from nonliving matter. For example, Alexander Ross wrote the following:

[May one] doubt whether, in cheese and timber, worms are generated, or, if beetles and wasps, in cow's dung, or if butterflies, locusts, shellfish, snails, eels, and suchlike be procreated of putrefied matter, which is apt to receive the form of that creature to which it is by the formative power disposed of. To question this is to question reason, sense, and experience. If he doubts of this, let him go to Egypt, and there he will find the fields swarming with mice begot of the mud of the Nylus [Nile], to the great calamity of the inhabitants. (Alexander Ross, *Arcana Microcosmi*, 1652.)

This belief seemed plausible because living things appear in wet or rotting matter. But as the scientific revolution progressed, people started looking closer and found that the opposite was true.

In the 17th century, the British physiologist William Harvey discovered that every animal originates from an egg. Italian biologist Francesco Redi established that maggots appear in meat only when flies are allowed to lay eggs on it. In the 19th century, Louis Pasteur demonstrated conclusively that even the most minute creatures did not originate from inanimate matter but from “germs.”

Around the same time, Charles Darwin proposed his theory of evolution. While he focussed on how living things may change, he also spared some time speculating to his botanist friend Joseph Hooker about how life might have begun in a “warm little pond, with all sorts of ammonia and phosphoric salts, light, heat, electricity,...” Louis Pasteur was a creationist. He summarised his findings in the law of biogenesis: “Life comes only from life.”

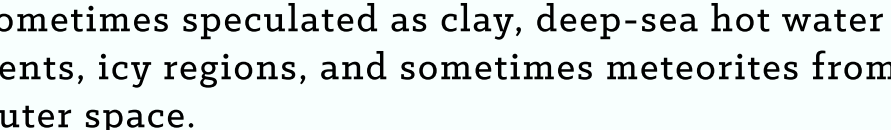
Darwin and others did not become atheists because they found that life could arise from nonliving matter. They chose to be atheists and therefore speculated that life arose from nonliving matter.

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*Louis Pasteur was a creationist. He summarised his findings in the law of biogenesis: “Life comes only from life.”*  
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Evolutionists have proposed a mechanism by which organisms can change, and thus how a single-celled organism can change into a human. But this mechanism is based on reproduction and the chances of survival. There is no reproduction or survival before life is formed. Thus, the question remains: how can the basic building blocks combine to form the marvelous structures needed for life?

In 1952, Stanley Miller and Harold Urey performed an experiment. They passed electric sparks (simulating lightning) into a liquid solution mixed with methane, ammonia, water vapor, and hydrogen. Some amino acids were produced. Atheists claim this is promising because amino acids are a key component of living things. About 22 different amino acids can be found in living things.

Scientists now believe Earth's early atmosphere had a different chemical makeup from Miller and Urey's recipe. Several variations of the experiment have been tried, with qualitatively similar results.



Urey (right) and Miller (left).

Since the Stanley-Miller experiment, groundbreaking experiments have yet to be successfully performed on the origin of life. There has been lots of speculation on the subject, with fancy terms. You can read about “proto-cells” and “the RNA world”, “Coenzyme world model”, etc. None of these things are known to have existed. They are all part of speculation as to how life may have originated. The place where life originated is sometimes speculated as clay, deep-sea hot water vents, icy regions, and sometimes meteorites from outer space.

A chain made of a few dozen amino acid molecules is called a protein. Proteins perform crucial tasks in cells. Proteins in a cell can be compared to machines or tools in a space station.

A nucleotide is a large molecule consisting of one of four bases (adenine, thymine, guanine, and cytosine), a sugar molecule, and a phosphoric acid molecule. Three nucleotides make a codon, a code specifying an amino acid. Many codons together make a gene. A gene is thus a code for many amino acids, i.e., a protein. The genome is the entire set of genes. The genome contains all the information about the organism - the eyes' color, height, hair thickness, etc. The amount of data stored in the genome is several times that of a standard encyclopedia.

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Imagine an automobile plant and, next to it, a manual that specifies every single detail in the automobile plant. Miller's experiment can be compared to an unattended fire in the blacksmith's shop producing a few nuts and bolts. The fire did not produce any thoughts about whether the market was ready for luxury or economical cars, hatchbacks, SUVs, or sedans. Thus, no amount of fire in the blacksmith's shop can produce the manual or the plant.

Or, to use another analogy, rats running around on computers may produce a few printouts with random letters. But when did India get independence? Nothing in the rats' actions conveys this information. Hence the rats will not produce a book on India's freedom struggle no matter how long they keep running and how many pages get printed. In the same way, Miller's chemicals will never become alive.

In today's world, DNA needs proteins to form, and proteins require DNA to form, so how could these have developed without each other? Furthermore, both proteins and DNA are large molecules consisting of strings of small component molecules whose synthesis is supervised by proteins and DNA. We have two chickens, two eggs, and no answer to the old problem of which came first.

Scientists earlier proposed RNA as a possible precursor to both DNA and proteins. According to the journal *Molecular Biology of the Cell*, it can store information like DNA, serve as an enzyme like proteins, and help create both DNA and proteins. Later, DNA and proteins succeeded this “RNA world,” because they were more efficient. The question remains how (the very complex) RNA got here in the first place.

Some scientists have speculated that instead of life beginning with RNA, it developed in a highly gradual way with simple molecules undergoing simple processes that gradually became more complex very slowly. This is called the “metabolism first” hypothesis, unlike the “RNA world” hypothesis. No one has demonstrated experimentally how these simple processes lead to DNA, proteins, etc.

The problem is not about building bigger and bigger molecules and getting the right chemical reactions to happen. It is about how intelligent code can be written. Few people realize this. One of them is the well-known Australian physicist Paul Davies:

“Trying to make life by mixing chemicals in a test tube is like soldering switches and wires in an attempt to produce Windows 98. It won't work because it addresses the problem at the wrong conceptual level.... How did molecular hardware get to write its own software?” – Paul Davies, *How we could create life*, *The Guardian*, 11 December 2002.

One of the most vocal spokespersons for atheism in recent years, Richard Dawkins, seems keen to give the impression that scientists are making progress on the origin of life. This needs linguistic gymnastics because the reality is that research is only revealing more and more complexities in living things:

“The origin of life may have been a highly improbable event. ...The origin of life was the chemical event, or series of events, whereby the vital conditions for natural selection came about. The major ingredient was heredity, either DNA or (more probably) something that copies like DNA but, less accurately, perhaps the related molecule RNA. Once the vital ingredient – some kind of generic molecule – is in place, true Darwinian natural selection can follow, and complex life emerges as the eventual consequence.

The spontaneous arising by chance of the hereditary molecule is improbable. May be it is – very, very, improbable... The origin of life is a flourishing, if speculative, subject for research... And it is still possible to maintain that the probability of its [the origin of life's] happening is, and always was, exceedingly low – although it did happen once!” – Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p 137 (2006).

Dawkins' book tries to argue that belief in God is a delusion. But the language he uses betrays that he is deluded.

Occasionally, there are scientists in the secular community, honest and bold enough to admit the obvious:

“I will not accept [creation] philosophically because I do not want to believe in God. Therefore I choose to believe in what I know to be scientifically impossible, spontaneous evolution.” – Nobel laureate George Wald, *Biochemical Science: An Inquiry into Life*.

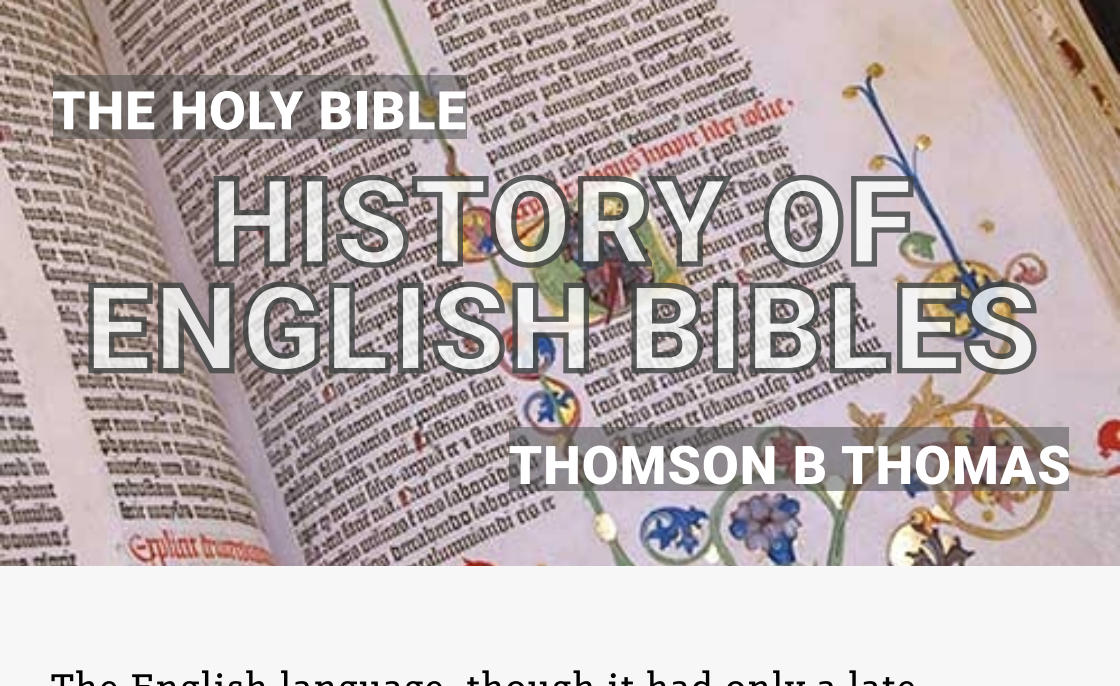
“In short there is not a shred of objective evidence to support the hypothesis that life began in an organic soup here on the Earth.” – Fred Hoyle, *The Intelligent Universe*, New York: Holt, Rinhart and Winston, 1983, p23.

“Research on the origin of life seems to be unique in that the conclusion has already been authoritatively accepted... What remains to be done is to find the scenarios which describe the detailed mechanisms and processes by which this happened.” – Yockey, H.P., A calculation of the probability of spontaneous biogenesis by information theory, *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, 67:377-398, 1977; quotes from pp. 379, 396.

The simple negative fact is that no one has observed life forming independently, and much of what we know in chemistry suggests that it cannot. The simple positive point is that in all known examples of information (novels, codes, encyclopedias, newspapers, etc), the information is known to have originated in an intelligent mind. The existence of living things is thus strong evidence of a Creator. It's as simple as that.

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THE HOLY BIBLE

# HISTORY OF ENGLISH BIBLES

THOMSON B THOMAS

The English language, though it had only a late beginning and development, has developed to become a predominant world language. The Celts were the earliest Indo-Europeans to settle in Britain, and their entry occurred before 1000 B.C. Their language was the first one recorded in Britain. When the Romans expanded their empire under Julius Caesar, they attempted an invasion of Britain (55 B.C.); however, they were unable to conquer it until the reign of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 43). It was at that time that the Druid religion of the Britons was abolished and the religion of Rome introduced. Later, when Rome withdrew from Britain, when their empire weakened in the early 5th century AD, Scots, Saxons, and Angles settled in the land of England. The term England is derived from ‘Angle land.’ Their influence caused the development of Old English. Its period of dominance extends from about 450 to 1100 AD. The second period was that of Middle English; it extended from about 1100 to about 1500. Due to the influence of the French, many French words got added to the language spoken in England during this period. The third period, that of Modern English, began shortly after Johann Gutenberg’s invention of movable type (c. 1454), though it was not the direct cause of linguistic development. Before 1400, there was no indication of the shift in vowel sounds or pronunciations (Middle English), but after 1500, the sounds had completed their transition, and Modern English was born.

Christianity was introduced in Britain during the late first century or early second century and was most assuredly there during the third century. There were enough Christians in Britain to send three bishops to the Council (synod) at Arles in AD 314.<sup>1</sup> From the fourteenth century AD, translation to the English language was made, and presently, the Bible is translated to this language more than in any other language.

## The First English Bible

John Wycliffe produced the first hand-written English Bible manuscripts in AD 1380s – the whole New Testament in 1380 and the Old Testament in 1382. But this doesn’t mean there were no translations from the scriptures into the English language before this. Attempts were made to render some portions into English.

Earl L Brown Jr. summarizes those attempts in the following words. “Foremost of the portions of the Bible paraphrased became the psalms, sometimes with meter. Caedmon (a seventh-century monk) made a metrical version of some portions of Scripture. Bede translated the Gospels into English. It is claimed that he finished translating the Gospel of John on his deathbed in AD 735. Alfred the Great (reigned from 871-899) translated the Psalms and Ten Commandments. Some interlinear translations remain from the tenth century. The Lindisfarne Gospels are cited as the most famous of this period (ca. 950). Aelfric (ca. 955-1020) made idiomatic translations of Scripture portions. Two of them exist today. Almost three hundred years later, William of Shoreham and Richard Rolle each translated the Psalter. Rolle’s work included a verse-by-verse commentary. Both Psalters were popular at the time of John Wycliffe (ca. 1329-1384).”<sup>2</sup> The Wessex Gospels in Old English also appeared about the same time.

Daniel J Lewis writes, quoting authorities, that at the end of the 12th century, Orm, an Augustinian monk, produced a poetical version of the Gospels and Acts. And by the middle of the 13th century, Genesis and Exodus were rendered into rhyming English verse. Similar work was done on the book of Psalms also. By the end of the 14th century, the most important epistles in the New Testament were translated. These were all done in the Middle English period.<sup>3</sup>

John Wycliffe was an Oxford professor, scholar, and theologian. With the help of the Lollards, his followers, and other faithful men like his assistant Purvey, he produced many manuscripts of the Bible in English. This infuriated the Pope. In his fury, even forty-four years after Wycliffe’s death, he ordered his bones to be dug out and scattered in the river. John Wycliffe is called the ‘Morning Star of the Reformation’ for his part in the Reformation. John Hus was Wycliffe’s associate. He also labored to bring the Word of God to the common people in their language. But the Roman church threatened anyone possessing a non-Latin Bible with execution. John Hus was burned at the stake in 1415, with Wycliffe’s manuscript Bibles used for burning. His last words were that one hundred years from then, God would raise a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed. These words were prophetic and found fulfillment in Martin Luther, the Reformer.

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## Catalyst for Publishing

Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press in the 1450s; the first book printed was a Latin language Bible in Germany. The invention of the movable-type printing press meant that Bibles and books could finally be effectively produced in large quantities in a short period. This contributed to the success of the Reformation.

Towards the end of the 15th century, Thomas Linacre, an Oxford professor and the physician to King Henry the 7th and 8th, studied Greek and compared the Latin Vulgate with the original and found the sheer variance and was amazed at the corruption in the official Latin version. Seeing a great need, another Oxford professor, John Colet, translated the Greek New Testament directly to English for his students at Oxford. When it was used in the church for public reading, in St. Paul’s Cathedral, the attendance swelled to 20000 people. The public was so eager to hear God’s word in their language. As he was a very influential man, none dared to trouble him.

The success of these men, Linacre and Colet, encouraged Erasmus to produce, with the help of John Froben, a printer, the first Greek-Latin New Testament. This milestone was the first non-Latin Vulgate text of the scripture to be produced in a millennium! Erasmus translated from reliable Greek manuscripts independent of the Latin Vulgate. Erasmus published his work in 1516.

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# DISCIPLESHIP

## TRAINING THE TWELVE (III)

EBY VARGHESE

CS Lewis wrote in one of his books, ‘Let your religion be less of a Theory and More of a love story.’ Christian discipleship is rooted in the teachings of Christ, but it can only be actualized by practically living like a disciple – loving the Lord and following His commandments. Mere knowledge of Christ’s teachings will not do any good to a believer. In the previous issues, we focused on some of the important practical lessons that Christ taught on the meaning of true discipleship. We will continue to look into that and focus on Christ’s teaching in Luke 9:23-26 in this issue.

### ***The four-fold dimensions of true discipleship***

Following a long discourse with his disciples, Jesus engages them in a much deeper conversation about discipleship. This is perhaps one of the most quoted Bible passages on discipleship. If we observe this passage, we can immediately notice a change in the tone or maybe a serious undertone. Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Jesus wanted His disciples to understand clearly what it means to follow Him. In the given passage, Jesus lays out a four-fold dimension of discipleship and further expounds on it.

1. **Desire:** Observe how Jesus begins His statement, ‘IF’ anyone would come after me...! Jesus never forced anyone to follow Him. Discipleship is strictly a matter of personal desire. One must have the desire to follow Christ to become His disciple. It is purely based on the conviction of a believer, rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Without this desire, no one can become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

2. **Denial:** The second dimension that Jesus wanted His disciples to understand is self-denial. Relationship with Christ is exclusive. There is no room for ‘self.’ Self-denial is consciously choosing to refrain from satisfying one’s desires or interests for the sake of Christ, keeping Christ above all, and living for His glory alone. Discipleship demands self-denial.

3. **Decision:** The third dimension concerns our decision to suffer for Christ. Jesus said, if anyone would come after Me, he must take up his cross daily. The cross in the Jewish world symbolized suffering, pain, insult, and shame. A disciple of Christ must be ready to go through all the sufferings for the sake of Christ. Jesus Himself said you would be hated by all men for My name’s sake (Matt. 10:22). Thus, discipleship involves a personal decision to suffer for Christ.

4. **Direction:** Jesus ends His statement by saying, ‘Follow me.’ The fourth dimension is about the direction to follow in life. Discipleship demands a constant ‘moving’ toward the direction where Christ leads.

***Discipleship is strictly a matter of personal desire. One must have the desire to follow Christ to become His disciple.***

When we read the narratives about Jesus’ disciples in the Bible and Church History, we see these four dimensions as highlights of their life. They denied themselves and suffered for the sake of Christ. Acts 17:6 says that these disciples turned the world upside down. This life is not easy, though. It requires a commitment to live out Christ every day. There is a cost that we must pay. In the same passage, Jesus further explains the cost of discipleship. We can see a paradoxical nature of discipleship in these verses. Consider the following:

#### **1. Life in the World versus Life in Christ:**

*Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it (v.24).*

Those solely focused on preserving their own lives or prioritizing their desires will ultimately lose out in the grand scheme of things. In contrast, those willing to “lose” their lives, in the sense of self-denial and sacrifice, for the sake of Jesus, will find true life and salvation. Jesus is highlighting the importance of selflessness, surrendering our desires and ambitions, and aligning our life with the principles and teachings of Christ. The verse speaks of the transformative power of faith and tells us that true discipleship is found in self-denial and devotion to a higher calling.

#### **2. Glory in the World versus Glory in Christ:**

*For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? (v.25)*

Jesus highlights the futility of worldly gain and the inherent worth of an individual’s soul. Material possessions, worldly achievements, or temporary successes, no matter how significant, are all ultimately of little value compared to the eternal nature of the soul or the spiritual well-being of a person. We need to prioritize spiritual growth over the pursuit of wealth, power, or superficial gains. Discipleship calls for self-reflection and prompts individuals to examine their priorities, recognizing that the accumulation of worldly possessions or achievements, if pursued at the expense of one’s soul, ultimately leads to emptiness and spiritual loss.

#### **3. Denial by the World versus Denial by Christ:**

*For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and the holy angels. (v.26)*

Jesus speaks about the importance of one’s attitude towards Him and His words. Those who are ashamed or deny Jesus and His teachings in this life will face a corresponding consequence when Jesus returns in His glory, accompanied by the glory of the Father and the holy angels. A true disciple of Jesus should not be ashamed or hesitant to identify with Him, share His message, and live by His teachings. Denying or being ashamed of Jesus could result in being denied or disowned by Him in the future.

This verse underscores the importance of authenticity and commitment to one’s faith. It encourages individuals to be unashamedly devoted to Jesus, even in the face of societal pressures, persecution, or the opinions of others. It calls for a steadfast and unwavering commitment to following Jesus and being a witness for Him.

In conclusion, discipleship comes with a cost. If we want to follow Christ, we must be ready to pay the cost. If we are not ready to suffer for Christ’s sake, we may never become His true disciples. The present-day church needs disciples who can turn the world upside down.

***Those who are ashamed or deny Jesus and His teachings in this life will face a corresponding consequence when Jesus returns in His glory, accompanied by the glory of the Father and the holy angels.***



## CHRIST OUR LIFE

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM

A little child scribbled on a white paper, spoiled it, and brought it back to the teacher, crying. The teacher took the sheet from him with a pat on his back, gave him another new white paper, and told him sternly, “Now, don’t spoil this. Write carefully and legibly on this and show me.” The child went back to his seat, and now he was careful. Adam started well in Eden. His surroundings were immaculate. But sin spoiled it. And it stained all humanity, including you and me. Now God gives us a new life in Christ and commands us not to spoil it. Jesus Christ is our life (Jn. 14:6; Col. 3:4).

### ***Promise of Life***

In His omniscience, God saw the problem of sin even before man was created, in the past eternity. He promised life through the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul describes his apostleship as “according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:1). Writing to Titus, he explains this phrase. There he says this is about the eternal life promised before the world began (Tit. 1:2). This means that God foresaw the need for life and promised it. This verse must refer to the eternal counsels between the three Persons in the Trinity. The eternal life promised is God’s life itself. This is the only life that is not created. This life has no beginning and no end. When a person trusts the Lord Jesus for salvation, he becomes a possessor of this life of God. God made the promise for this divine provision in the past eternity.

This promise was reiterated in the proto-evangelium. God made this promise immediately after Adam fell into sin. God told Satan, “He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15). This was also reflected in all the types and shadows of the Savior, in the promises and expectations of the saints in the Old Testament.

### ***Provision of Life***

Paul, writing to Timothy, says that the promise and purposes of God “have now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). This passage describes the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into this earth to save sinners. By His death on the cross of Calvary, He destroyed death. He made it powerless. Of course, death reigns and is a terror even now, also. But it is like a defeated enemy. In God’s appointed time, He shall cast death and Hades into the hell fire (Rev. 20:14). Even now, for a believer, death is not a terror but a stepping stone into eternity, into the very presence of the Lord. All these provisions are based on the Lord’s death on the cross.

The words “[bringing] life and immortality to light through the gospel” indicate the offer of eternal life in the proclamation of the gospel. The gospel is the good news that anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus shall be given God’s life freely. Just as Paul was appointed a preacher and a teacher to preach the gospel, each believer must proclaim this good news to others.

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***Even now, for a believer, death is not a terror but a stepping stone into eternity, into the very presence of the Lord.***

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### ***Progress in Life***

Those who have received God’s life by faith must also grow spiritually. Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life and that they might have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). Receiving eternal life, God’s life, by faith is the beginning of our Christian life. One must grow in spiritual life. This is having His life ‘more abundantly.’ The experience of this abundant life in Christ shall be evident in having a victorious and dutiful life. Similarly, in a life where life is abundant, Christian joy shall be experienced. The Lord desires that every child of God should experience this abundant life.

### ***Permanence of Life***

As stated before, the life that Jesus gives is eternal. Just as it has no beginning, it also doesn’t have an end. Moreover, God secures this life. Jesus said, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of My Father’s hand” (Jn. 10:28,29). In encouraging timid Timothy to labor and suffer for the Lord, Paul said, “This is a faithful saying: For if we die with Him, we shall also live with Him” (2 Tim. 2:11). It is to prove this fact that the apostle mentioned the resurrection of the Lord. “Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel” (2 Tim. 2:8). Peter states the same idea in 1 Peter 1:21. This means that even if we suffer or the inevitable happens, we are secured with Him.

God’s life promised, provided, progressing, and permanent can be the possession of all those who put their trust in the Lord Jesus. Jesus Christ is their life. In Him is God’s life. The Bible says, “For God so loved the world that age gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Further, it warns, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn. 3:16,36). He that has ears let him hear and give heed. If we are possessors of God’s life, we are also partakers of the divine nature. Our lives must manifest His nature. Please do not allow the world to mar it.

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***God’s life promised, provided, progressing, and permanent can be the possession of all those who put their trust in the Lord Jesus. Jesus Christ is their life.***

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## MISSIONS

# JOHN SUNG

## STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM

John Sung is variously remembered as the “Wesley of China”, “the apostle of China,” and “probably the greatest preacher of this century”.

John Sung was born in 1901 in Hinghwa, Fujian province, South East China. His father was a Methodist pastor. The gospel first came to Hinghwa, a Buddhist stronghold, in 1862 when a student of the Church Missionary Society preached the gospel.

When John was born, his parents named him Ju-Un, which means God's Grace (which is close to the meaning of the English name John!) John had a happy childhood, growing up in a large, godly family in a home surrounded by beautiful countryside. He, however, inherited his father's hot temper.

He returned from school one day and found his youngest sister very sick. She died soon. “Where does a man go after death?” he asked. “To Jesus!” was the reply. It did not satisfy him. The fear of death haunted him.

A revival came to Hinghwa in 1909. In a month or two, there were 3000 conversions. New churches mushroomed in the various villages. It began with a Good Friday sermon titled: “Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane”. Among the many whose hearts were touched was nine-year-old John Sung. He was impressed that Christians in America had been praying specifically for a revival in Hinghwa. His father began taking him along with him on preaching trips and taught him how to pray and preach - he became known as the Little Pastor. He also edited his father's Revival magazine and taught children the Bible.

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*His father began taking him along with him on preaching trips and taught him how to pray and preach - he became known as the Little Pastor.*  
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Sometime later, his father fell sick and was at the point of death. When he felt overwhelmed, his mother told him: “Don't cry! Quickly go and pray for your father! Prayer will be answered!” In his desolation, the little lad went to his room and poured out his heart for his father. The prayer was immediately answered; the father made a speedy recovery. This incident was formative for one of the emphases in his life: prayer.

Finding China plagued with political unrest, John wanted to do his college education in America. His father was livid. “Don't think that I have money earned by the sweat of my brow for you to go and spend, eating foreign ink and filling your head with wind!” protested his father, “Don't forget that your father is not the Mandarin of Hinghwa, but a poor preacher!”

John Sung took the matter to God in prayer. He told God that after studying in America, he wanted to return to China and serve Him. The prayer was answered when an American lady missionary secured him admission and a tuition waiver at Ohio Wesleyan University. Young Chinese pastors his father had disciplined paid for his travel, and a barber's traditional Chinese treatment cured him of his trachoma.

Arriving in America, he had to do odd jobs to pay his rent. Instead of theology, he chose to study chemistry. He was a brilliant student, but the hard work affected his emotions and physical health. He developed piles and became depressed. Christian activities and help from the church, like church members paying for surgery, kept his head above the water.

At a friend's home in Smithville, Ohio, Sung had an experience on Thanksgiving Day, 1922, that made a deep and lasting impression on him. In a dream, he saw himself back at Hinghwa on the hilltop he loved so well. He suddenly heard a cry of distress from the river that flowed into the sea not far away. He tore down the hillside to rescue the drowning person but found himself in danger of drowning until a cross was planted in the stream. Then, with his feet planted firmly on it, he rescued not just one person but many – so many that they could not be counted. Finally, the scene changed, and he found himself among a joyful throng in Heaven, clasping his hand in gratitude and singing praises to God. To Sung this dream was an allegory of his own life, and he frequently related it when giving his testimony of God's dealings with him.

He graduated with exemplary grades, but his hard work was at the expense of his time with God. He went for his master's degree and PhD to Ohio State University, where he came under the influence of liberal Christians who taught that Jesus was merely a good man. He immersed himself in social activities and became popular.

One evening as he sat in the moonlight, thinking wistfully of his homeland and his home and deliberating what course he should take, he seemed to hear again the voice of God saying to him: “What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul?”

The next day, Wilbur Fowler, the Wesley Foundation representative at Ohio State University, called in to visit him and almost immediately remarked: “You know, you are not a bit like a scientist! You look far more like a preacher!” He asked if he would study at Union Theological Seminary, New York. John Sung agreed.

Union Theological Seminary was given over to liberalism. Sung started losing his interest in the Bible. He read the Buddhist and Taoist books that he found at the library. He started chanting Buddhist prayers. He tried the various cults and theosophic societies in New York, yet his heart was as dark, placeless, and miserable as ever. A failed romantic relationship with a young Chinese woman added to the mix.

One day he and some friends from seminary went to Calvary Baptist Church. To his shock, the “preacher” was a fifteen-year-old girl. As she came onto the platform, read the Scriptures, and led in prayer, Sung became aware of something different in the atmosphere; God's presence could be felt. The Gospel was presented clearly and powerfully, and the Cross was uplifted. “Even I, a proud man, was moved by her”, said Sung, “and my soul's thirst was somewhat slaked.” He determined he would give anything to have the kind of power the young girl displayed.

As he prayed about it, the words, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning will I bring to nought”.

“  
*Union Theological Seminary was given over to liberalism. Sung started losing his interest in the Bible. He read the Buddhist and Taoist books that he found at the library.*  
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He stopped attending lectures and began spending all his time reading and praying. One evening, he saw all his sins spread before him; he was frightened. He opened his New Testament after months and began reading from Luke 23. The scene of the Cross came alive; it seemed like he was right there at the foot of the cross. He pleaded to be washed from his sins in the Lord's precious blood. Crying and praying till midnight, he heard a voice: “Son, your sins are forgiven”. An enormous load seemed to fall from his shoulders. Greatly relieved, he shouted and started running down the dormitory corridor, waking his sleeping fellow students.

Some days later, he had a strange dream. Looking into an open coffin, he saw that the corpse was himself, dressed in an academic cap and gown and holding a diploma! He heard a voice say, “John Sung is dead – dead to the world!” Then the corpse began to stir and awaken, and angels above began to weep, until he called out, “Don't weep, angels! I will remain dead to the world and self!” All the remaining years of his life show how sincerely he carried this out. Another striking thing happened to him within a week of his midnight experience. A stranger one day presented him with a globe of the world, which he took to mean that the Lord had called him to carry the Gospel to the whole earth. He prayed more earnestly that God would enable him to fulfill His will for his life.

He burned his liberal theological books as “books of demons” and ceased to attend lectures. The seminary removed his name from the list of students. To Harry Emerson Fosdick, a leading spokesman of the Social Gospel at the University, he said, “You are of the devil”.

Around this time, the seminary authorities felt he was mentally ill and put him into a mental asylum. He was allowed his Bible. He read it several times and made extensive study notes. He was released from the asylum on condition that he would return to China.

On his way back, with much internal struggle, John Sung threw all his medals (except one, for his father's sake) into the sea. As his family welcomed him with a feast, his father said:

“Ju-un, now that you have your diploma, I hope you will accept a position in a Government university. I have been a Bible teacher all my life. I have received only \$30 a month as a salary. We could never have fed our ten children unless your mother had provided the rice. Now I hope you will help to educate your younger brothers!”

Things were just as John had feared. But his decision had been made, and he replied respectfully: “Father, I cannot do this, for I have dedicated my life to the preaching of the gospel!” The whole family wept with disappointment. However, John Sung did accept a teaching position in the Methodist Christian High School - to teach chemistry and Bible for three days a week, and thus he supported his younger brother through college.

His parents got him married – the match had been fixed before his birth. He gave in to the custom. Although his wife was not a disciple of Christ, she was a faithful companion to him. Soon he joined the “Bethel Band” from Shanghai, under the leadership of Andrew Gih and Joseph Flacks, a Jewish Christian. Their revival meetings were highly fruitful, characterized by the power of the Holy Spirit, with many nominal Christians coming to faith in Christ. Frank Cartwright, then Director of Evangelism of the Methodist Mission at Foochow, describes John's preaching: “John's preaching was impassioned and strangely patterned on the preaching and pulpit mannerisms of Billy Sunday (whom John may have heard preach in America). He would race back and forth on the platform or leap over the Communion rail and stand in the aisles. Or he would walk down the aisles and point his finger in the face of someone in the audience, then rush back to the front of the church and perhaps stand on the Communion rail to finish his sermon! Many people came forward after every meeting to pray and accept Christ.” Sometimes he would play the parts of the Biblical characters in the incident he was narrating. Sometimes he would break into song or prayer during his sermons.

He organized Bible studies to train new believers and young pastors. He also set up an “itinerant theology college” for theology students who were spiritually cold. They would visit villages and help the farmers with their work during the day and preach to them in the evenings.

This was also a time of persecution from the Nationalist Party (which now controls Taiwan). On more than one occasion, Sung escaped arrest closely. He also struggled with contentment. On a tight budget, he sometimes wished he had the salary he could have gotten teaching chemistry at a government university. He also had pride. He wanted to preach in big cities rather than small villages. He confessed his desire to run ahead of God's timing when he got cholera.

“  
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”

He sensed God telling him, “Arise, my son! The time has come! Leave your land and go to the place whither I will lead you!”

“Without further delay”, John writes, “I said farewell to my wife who was still on a bed of sickness and to my family and took a ship to Shanghai. I dared not look back to see my ailing, sorrowing wife but steeled myself to follow Christ in the way of the Cross.”

As he traveled from place to place, he perceived that the main problem of the churches in China was that many Chinese pastors and missionaries were there just for a salary from Western denominational leaders, without a genuine call and sometimes even a real salvation experience. As a result, much of the church population was Christian only in a nominal sense.

John Sung mercilessly attacked church officials, mission school teachers, and liberal leaders. He also refused to get sidetracked by the literacy movement of Dr. James Yen or the social gospel, which Japanese leader Dr Tojohito Kagawa was lecturing about at Shanghai Christian University.

In 1925, he was about to go home to Hinghwa for a break when he received a pressing invitation.

“I recognized in the invitation to Nanchang”, John records, “the clear guidance of God. This was to be the turning point in my whole ministry - the end of going around in circles in the atmosphere of the talk about ‘movements’ and ‘education’, ‘sacrifice’ and ‘service’. Had I returned to Hinghwa, I might never have accomplished anything for God. All my work up to this time had been lacking in direction and purpose. I had been trying to serve God within the framework of liberal Christianity. I did not fit in, but I saw no way out! My visit to Nanchang brought the light and direction I needed, and the future suddenly seemed bright with promise! The Lord Jesus said of Himself: ‘The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.’ Alas, many Christian workers spend their time talking about ‘movements’; one new movement follows another, and when all has been said and done men's hearts remain unmoved, and souls remain unsaved. They forget that the Lord came to save sinners. The salvation of sinners is the only thing that matters!”

He went to Nanchang, but the meetings just seemed routine. One night after he had retired, he heard the sound of praying upstairs. It was his host William Schubert pleading with God for revival: “Lord, let me see revival in Nanchang, or let me go home to America!” John Sung joined him in word and in heart. God showed him that he must preach with an emphasis on exposing sin and bringing people to repentance. God sent a revival in Nanchang. One of the missionaries wrote in the summer of 1931: “We are having a Bible revival in Nanchang and Kiukiang... Dr. Sung can take any Bible passage you suggest and make it alive like I have heard almost no other man do. He still spends hours daily with the Book, and that is the secret of his success.”

Along with many travels in China, God also used John Sung in Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand. Five epic journeys between 1935-1940 covered most of these places. Preaching in large churches, minor and major cities, and rural villages, he attracted huge crowds, many thousands of whom were deeply moved by his preaching; they responded with weeping, open confessions of sin, and expressions of commitment to Christ. He battled external opposition, including slander and threats of death, and internal church division and strife, not to mention his physical weakness and pain. Still, he kept pushing on, passionate in his desire to see people come to the saving faith in Christ.

Frequently, his visits would bring people from different churches together. In contrast to Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng) and Wang Mingdao (two other Chinese giants), he did not encourage believers to withdraw from their denominations, which missionaries had founded and were sometimes under missionary control.

He was a man of prayer. John Sung made it his regular habit to be up every morning at 5 a.m. to pray for two or three hours. “Prayer for John Sung was like a battle. He prayed until the sweat poured down his face.” At times he would collapse upon his bed and uncontrollably weep and sob under the burden of travelling prayer. Mr. Boon Mark said of John Sung, “He talked least, preached more, and prayed most.” When people were healed through his prayers, “Dr. Sung was careful not to usurp any glory, and would rebuke sharply any who mentioned his name or credited him”.

The Rev. William E. Shubert, who watched Sung for many years and became his close friend, wrote in 1976, “Dr John Sung was probably the greatest preacher of this century. I have heard almost all the great preachers from 1910 until now, including [he names several famous preachers] and Billy Graham. Yet John Sung surpassed them all in pulpit power, attested by amazing and enduring results... I learned more from Dr. Sung in three weeks than three years in theological seminary”.

As he aged, his piles worsened. Sometimes he would preach kneeling down to lessen the pain. During the last three years of his life, he couldn't travel. He lived in Beijing. However, it was still a fruitful time of prayer and mentoring. “These grinding sufferings are necessary to take away our dross so that we might face our Lord without fear” he wrote.

Finally, after years of suffering from this affliction, he died at only 43 on August 18, 1944. His impact was phenomenal. He is estimated to have been instrumental in some way in nearly 100,000 Chinese individuals deciding to follow Christ, about one in ten Chinese Christians at the time of his death.

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## HYMN STORY

# I HAVE DECIDED TO FOLLOW JESUS

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM

There was a great revival in Wales about 150 years ago. As a result, many missionaries from Wales came to northeast India to spread the Gospel. Some went to the Assam region, which comprised hundreds of tribes who were primitive and aggressive head-hunters at the time. Other missionaries from the American Baptist Mission also tried to work in the land, spreading the message of love, peace and hope in Jesus Christ.

The head-hunting tribes did not welcome them. However, one missionary succeeded in leading a man named Nokseng, his wife, and two children to Christ. He was from the Garo tribe in Assam. He influenced many others in his village to receive Christ. The village chief became furious at Nokseng's newfound faith in a God who seemed to live far away on another continent. He summoned the whole village and asked Nokseng to renounce his faith publicly or face execution.

Nokseng replied under the influence of the Holy Spirit:

"I have decided to follow Jesus."

Enraged, the chief ordered his archers to shoot their arrows at Nokseng's two children. As both the boys lay twitching on the ground, the chief asked, "Will you deny your faith? You have lost both your children. You will lose your wife too."

But the man replied:

"Though none go with me, still I will follow."

Bewildered, the chief ordered Nokseng's wife to be arrowed down too. Soon his wife was dead alongside his children. Now the frustrated chief asked for the last time, "I will give you one more opportunity to deny your faith and live." Nokseng, however, stood tall and said these final memorable lines:

"The cross before me, the world behind me. No turning back."

At the chief's orders, Nokseng was also killed.

But what followed their death was no less than a miracle than the resilient faith of the new Christian. The chief who had ordered the killings was disturbed by Nokseng's faith. He wondered, "Why should this man, his wife, and two children die for a Man who lived in a faraway land on another continent some 2,000 years ago? There must be some remarkable power behind the family's faith, and I, too, want to taste that faith." The Holy Spirit touched and deeply convicted him, and he spontaneously confessed, "I, too, belong to Jesus Christ!" When the crowd heard this from the mouth of their chief, the whole village accepted Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

“

***Nokseng, however, stood tall and said these final memorable lines:  
“The cross before me, the world behind me. No turning back.”***

***At the chief's orders, Nokseng was also killed.***

”

It is unclear exactly when and how Nokseng's words were formed into a hymn. Some traditions attribute this compilation to the Indian missionary Sadhu Sundar Singh and Simon Marak from Jorhat, Assam.

The Baptist hymnologist William J. Reynolds discovered this song in 1958. He arranged the melody and published it in the Assembly Songbook (Nashville, 1959). The tune was called Assam.

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# THE COST OF LOVE

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM

The story has been told of a young lad who had built a miniature boat with his own hands using wood from the backyard of his house. After many days of toil and hard work, he finished building a beautiful boat. One fine afternoon he went to a nearby seashore and tried to float his boat on the water. The boat started floating, but soon it was hit by a strong wave. He tried to pick his boat but could not do it. In just a few moments, he lost his beautiful boat. With tears in his eyes, he went back home. A few days later, as he was visiting a nearby market, he saw his boat hanging inside one of the stores. He could not control his excitement and ran inside the store to get his boat back. He told the shopkeeper that it was his boat and he had lost it a few days back and now wanted it back. The shopkeeper demanded Rs.500 for the boat. This young lad was shocked to hear the shopkeeper's response and replied – why should I pay for my boat? The shopkeeper replied – It was yours, but now it is mine; if you want it back, you need to pay the cost! The boy loved his boat so much that he paid the price and took his boat back home.

This may sound like a total injustice to any typical listener. We may even feel pity on this young lad that he had to pay the cost to get back what is rightfully his own. He loved his boat so much that he was ready to pay for it. We may as well ask the question - was it worth paying?

Love is one of the most misunderstood terms of modern times. We want love, but we are not ready to pay the price. We want love but are not ready to work hard for it. We want a love that is effortless and free of cost. The truth is that love is hard work and comes with a cost. The most outstanding example of such love is seen on the cross of Calvary. Two thousand years back, God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to this world so that He could die as an atonement for mankind. God created man in His image to have fellowship with God. But man decided to disobey God and fell short of God's glory in which he was created. This disobedience or sin separated man from the Holy God, and man was condemned to eternal damnation. But God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

“

***Love is one of the most misunderstood terms of modern times. We want love, but we are not ready to pay the price.***

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Like the young lad, God was ready to pay the cost to redeem mankind because He loved us that much. The very creation of God, whom He made with His own hands, had to be redeemed back. The creator God paid a heavy price – the blood of His Son Jesus Christ, to redeem mankind from eternal damnation. For the sake of love, He paid the price.

Dear reader, you may search for the perfect love in this world but not find it. But here is the good news, God loves you! There is no greater love than that which was shown on the cross of Calvary. This loving God wants to save you and have fellowship with you. Would you consider loving Him back and inviting Him as your personal Savior today? He has already paid the price to love you. All you need to do is to put your trust in Him.

“

***There is no greater love than that which was shown on the cross of Calvary.***

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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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