

STRAIGHT PATHS

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

EDITORIAL

In today's world, there is so much of emphasis on productivity and efficiency, and for good reason, because we have limited time and other resources, and to make our lives enjoyable, we need to make the best use of these resources. From God's word we understand that the ultimate and only true productivity is spiritual productivity. A life lived for Christ is well-lived. In Life-Issues, Eby Varghese teaches us about the spiritual rhythm of rest - it is needed to be truly productive. In Apologetics, we look into the atheists' claim that the human body has inefficiencies, and therefore does not look created. Beyond efficiency and productivity there is beauty and precision. In the Jesus Series, we learn how the Savior of the world would be the Seed of the woman - the very point where Satan attacked the human race would be the point from which the rescue would take place. In Missions, we learn of Patrick, whose life was amazingly productive because God enabled him to turn a nation towards Christ. Having said that, the Christian faith is about loving God, not trying to be productive - that is only a byproduct. In Hymn Stories, Sheba Chani narrates the story of a man who was overwhelmed by God's deep love and sang about it.

As we read this edition of Straight Paths, may our lives be truly productive and bring glory to God.

Johnny Varghese

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STRAIGHT PATHS

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

Vestigial Organs

JOHNNY VARGHESE

In the previous articles of this series, we have been examining the evidence that scientists offer for the theory of evolution, the atheist explanation for the origin of life. We found that there is no evidence that inanimate matter could produce the genetic code needed for life. We found that the fossil record has many organisms that display “mosaic” features, that is, features belonging to different classes of modern organisms. Still, hardly any examples clearly show features in transit, like a lung that is partly reptilian and partly avian. In particular, we found that the so-called “ape-men” are either extinct apes or humans descended from Noah. We then examined the proposed mechanism of evolution, and found that organisms indeed change, with two essential features. Firstly, this change is rapid enough to explain the emergence of millions of species from the few thousand ancestors on Noah’s Ark. Secondly; this change consists of random modifications and/or the shuffling or deletion of genetic information - not the kind of change needed to produce new features that never existed before, like wings or musical acumen. In this article, we consider another evidence offered for evolution: vestigial structures.

According to UC Berkeley’s Evolution 101 course, a vestigial structure is a feature a species inherited from an ancestor but is now less elaborate and functional than in the ancestor. The ancestor may have had an organ or bone that became less useful as the environment changed. Hence, its descendants born with a defective version of this structure would have thrived, and many generations later, almost the whole population may have a degenerated version of the structure with little or no function.

A Creator would not make organisms with useless organs (so goes the argument), and we do see functional versions of these organs in other animals. Hence, biologists consider vestigial structures as evidence for evolution, much like the few Indian streets with British names are evidence of India’s colonial past. Let us consider some examples of vestigial structures.

Dewclaws: Several animals, including pigs, cattle, deer, and dogs, have dewclaws – reduced, nonfunctional digits that don’t touch the ground at all. Evolutionists think these animals inherited this vestigial feature from ancestors with more functional digits.

Claws on bird wings: Very few birds, such as juvenile hoatzins and some adult chickens and ostriches, have claws on their wings. However, many fossil birds had well-developed claws on their wings.

Palmar Grasp Reflex: Babies tightly grasp a finger or rod placed in their hands. Early research found that newborns can even support their weight with the grasp of a single hand. Evolutionists think that this is a vestige from our ape-like ancestors, whose offspring would have to cling to their mother’s fur or to a tree branch.

Coccyx: Humans have a so-called tail bone formed by the last few vertebrae. Evolutionists think this is evidence that we evolved from ancestors similar to today’s apes, who have tails.

Blind fish: Fish living in dark caves in the deep sea have degenerate eyes behind a flap of skin.

Flightless birds: Ostriches, kiwis, kakapos, and cassowaries have wings that are too weak to facilitate flight.

Wisdom teeth: Our jaws are too small to accommodate wisdom teeth, which are reminders of a past when humans had bigger jaws and ate more coarse food.

Plica semilunaris: This small fold at the inner corner of the human eye seems to be a vestige of the nictitating membrane, or third eyelid, which serves a protective purpose in many animals. It keeps their eyes moist and conceals the iris from predators (the iris is the part of the eye that shines in the dark).

Auricular (Ear) Muscles: Most of us can’t wiggle or flap our ears, but animals do it to hear better or express emotion - our ear muscles are vestigial versions of similar functional muscles in animals.

Darwin felt that since humans can hear sufficiently well by turning their heads, the ear muscles lost their function.

Palmaris Longus Muscle: Most, but not all, humans have a thin strip of muscle running from the wrist to the elbow. This muscle seems to have no function in humans but might have strengthened the grip of our ancestors.

The Appendix: The human appendix (a small pouch near the joint between the large and small intestines) is thought to be a vestige of a larger organ that helps some animals digest raw herbs and leaves. Evolutionists believe that after humans learned to control fire and cook food, they didn’t need this organ, and it degenerated into the present appendix.

Sex in Virgin Whiptail Lizards: Several species of the lizard genus *Cnemidophorus* have only females. They lay eggs that hatch without fertilization (an example of asexual reproduction). Sex is unnecessary and impossible for them. But sometimes a female will try to act like a male and try to have sex with another lizard. Evolutionists think this behavior is vestigial to some ancestor of the lizards that reproduced sexually.

The Sexual Organs of Dandelions: Like all flowers, dandelions have the proper organs (stamen and pistil) necessary for sexual reproduction, but they do not use them. Dandelions reproduce without fertilization; they clone themselves and are quite successful at it.

Like fossils, vestigial organs are circumstantial evidence. Evolutionists think that the theory of evolution is the best explanation for them. In the next article, we will examine how vestigial organs can be accounted for within the Biblical framework.

A Creator would not make organisms with useless organs (so goes the argument), and we do see functional versions of these organs in other animals.

BORN OF A WOMAN

THOMSON B THOMAS

Although the birth of Jesus was natural, his conception was supernatural. Usually, a child is begotten by the father. But about Jesus, Paul says, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4). Jesus was born of a woman, not of man – the Bible asserts this in many portions. He is called the ‘Seed of the woman’ (Genesis 3:15), He called God His Father (Luke 2:49); Gabriel announced the birth of Jesus first to Mary, but that of John the Baptist’s to Zachariah (Luke 1:11,12); the Lord Himself mentioned His “Father’s business” (Luke 2:49), and the psalmist speaks about His mother’s children (Psalm 69:7). Similarly, Mary’s expectation that He could miraculously provide wine at Cana (John 2:3), the acclaim of Elizabeth, “Blessed are you”, when she met Mary (Luke 1:46), and the phrase “of whom” (in Matthew 1:16) indicate this same truth. Further, Luke states that Jesus was commonly supposed to be Joseph’s son (Luke 3:23). All these actions point to the truth that Jesus was supernaturally born of a woman. The will of any man did not beget Him.

Born of a Virgin

In the Old Testament, Jesus’ coming through a virgin was prophesied. Ahaz, king of Judah, was in a predicament because Samaria and Syria came against him. Ahaz and Judah trembled. God sent Isaiah to Ahaz and assured Him of safety from the enemy’s assault, asking him to demand any sign for surety. But Ahaz said he would not test God. Thus, God Himself gave Him a sign. Isaiah said, “The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). This sign might have had its fulfillment in the royal family or the home of Isaiah. The word used for ‘virgin’ (alma) can indeed be rendered as ‘young woman.’ It need not be a virgin woman. But the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible has rendered it as ‘virgin’ (Parthenos). The New Testament also restricts it to a virgin woman (Matthew 1:23). Matthew’s statement that Joseph refrained from having any sexual relationships with Mary until Jesus was born also shows that she was a virgin.

The submission of Mary and Joseph deserves mention. When Gabriel informed Mary about the conception, “She was troubled at his saying” (Luke 2:29). But the angel clarified the matter to her. She yielded to God’s will but wondered, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” (Luke 2:34). In yielding to the will and work of God, she was opening herself to taunts and any social ostracism that could follow. She was only betrothed. Between betrothal and marriage, if any unseemly thing happens, it can become the reason for calling off the marriage plan and a penalty. But the assurance of the angel settled all matters for her. He says, “For with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 2:47). Mary rejoiced in the grace that God bestowed on her. She goes to the hill country of Judea to meet Elizabeth, who also had a supernatural encounter with God. Mary calls her unborn baby “My Saviour.”

Joseph’s decision to marry a visibly pregnant woman was commendable. When he “found” that she was pregnant, he, being a righteous man, wanted to put away Mary, thinking that she was unfaithful. But at the interposition of the angel, he took her as his wife. He was also making himself vulnerable to accusations from the people. If he was ready to marry Mary despite her being pregnant, people would say that Mary’s pregnancy was from him. Still, he yielded to Gabriel’s instructions. Even after Jesus reached adulthood, this accusation of illegitimate birth continued.

When the Jews told Jesus that they were not born of fornication (John 8:41), they might have meant that He was. At another time, they said that Jesus was a Samaritan (John 8:48). According to the Pulpit Commentary, they might have meant that Mary was conceived by a Samaritan, probably in her journey to Elizabeth, which might have taken about three to four months. On another occasion, they called Him the carpenter’s son (Matthew 13:55), probably suggesting that Jesus was an illegitimate child of Joseph and Mary. When Jesus was beginning His public ministry at the age of thirty, at the wedding in Cana, Mary asked Jesus to perform a miracle to supply wine which was exhausted, and show His glory (John 2:4). She might have made this request to refute the charges about his birth that were snowballing through the years. These incidents show how much ignominy the family suffered for the virgin birth.

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In yielding to the will and work of God, she was opening herself to taunts and any social ostracism that could follow.

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The Process of the Conception

Many have tried to explain the conception of virgin birth. Certain well-meaning Bible students say that God did not even use the seed of Mary for the conception of Jesus – He divinely created the seed and placed it in Mary’s womb. She was only a carrier. They quote for support the psalmist who says, “A body You have prepared for Me” (Hebrews 10:8). At the same time, there are others who say that God took the seed of Mary and made the human body for Jesus with it. The descriptions given for the Lord, such as, ‘Seed of the woman’ (Genesis 3:15), ‘Seed of David according to flesh’ (Romans 1:3), etc, seem to validate the latter view. But we should acknowledge that this is an area where even angels fear to tread. Quoting Gabriel’s words to Mary, Dr. Luke tells about the ‘How’ of the virgin birth. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:15).

God can create a person in any of four ways: as He created Adam, as He made Eve from Adam, by the union of a man and woman, or some other method. In the conception of Jesus, it was the fourth means He chose. It is a mystery of mysteries!

Significance of the Virgin Birth

For the supernatural birth of Jesus, a birth which was not from a union between man and woman, God could have used a married woman or a mother of other children also. But by choosing a virgin, God was making the birth of His Son unique. While on earth, He rode on a colt on which no one ever rode. After His death, He was buried in a tomb, wherein nobody was ever laid. Thus, at His birth, He was sent into the womb of a woman who had never borne a child!

The uniqueness of Jesus’ birth through a virgin woman proves His deity. This is indicated in the words of Gabriel. “Therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” He did not come like any of us, which establishes Him as a Person separate from humanity. He is God Himself.

THE SPIRITUAL RHYTHM OF SABBATH AND REST

EBY VARGHESE

In our fast-paced world, which equates productivity with value, the idea of rest can feel counterintuitive. Many Christians wrestle with the tension between diligent work and taking time to slow down and reflect on God—sometimes even feeling guilty for taking a day off or going on vacation. Yet Scripture presents rest not as an option but as a spiritual rhythm designed by God for our renewal. The practice of Sabbath and rest is more than simply ceasing from work; it is about aligning our hearts with God’s design for life, worship, and dependence on Him. In a culture that glorifies busyness, the Biblical rhythm of rest invites believers to embrace a lifestyle that reflects God’s intention for human flourishing. As part of our series on spiritual rhythms, this volume explores the Biblical foundation of rest, its significance for Christian living, and practical ways to incorporate this vital practice into daily life.

The Biblical Foundation of Sabbath

The foundation for understanding the concept of rest in a Christian context begins with the creation narrative in Genesis. After six days of creation, God rested on the seventh—not because He was weary, but to establish a pattern for humanity (Genesis 2:2-3). This divine pause was more than the cessation of work; it was an invitation for humans to share in God’s rhythm of life.

The Sabbath, instituted as a day of rest, underscores that God has woven rest into the fabric of creation. In Exodus 20:8-11, God commands, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” This directive is not merely about refraining from labor but setting aside time to reconnect with God and acknowledge His sovereignty over creation. The Sabbath offers a weekly opportunity to step away from life’s demands, recalibrate our hearts toward God, and find renewal. It is a sacred pause—a deliberate act of ceasing from work to reflect on God’s faithfulness and experience restoration.

Jesus and the Sabbath

Jesus redefined the Sabbath, emphasizing its purpose over rigid legalism. In Mark 2:27, He declares, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Rather than being a burdensome rule, the Sabbath is a gracious invitation to step into God’s rest. Jesus modeled this rhythm throughout His ministry. He often withdrew from crowds to pray (Luke 5:16), demonstrating that solitude and communion with the Father were essential, even in the midst of His mission. His life teaches us that rest is not about inactivity but about re-centering our souls on God’s presence. Rest is portrayed throughout Scripture as part of our inheritance as children of God. Jesus invites the weary and burdened to come to Him for rest (Matthew 11:28), highlighting that we find our true rest in a relationship with Him. The act of resting becomes an expression of trust in God’s provision and care. In fact, Jesus often encouraged His disciples to retreat to a quiet place for rest after their ministry efforts. By resting, believers renew their minds and spirits, allowing them to return to their tasks with greater strength and clarity.

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Why Sabbath and Rest Matter Today

Rest as Dignity

Rest is not merely a break from work; it affirms our dignity as human beings created in God’s image. It reminds us that our worth is not tied to productivity but is rooted in our identity as beloved children of God. Rest allows us to step away from the relentless pursuit of achievement and embrace our inherent value in Christ. Moreover, spiritual rest fosters intimacy with God. In stillness, we can wait for His voice and reflect on His goodness. Psalm 46:10 reminds us, “Be still, and know that I am God.” This stillness cultivates a deeper awareness of God’s presence, leading to an enriched spiritual life.

Rest as Resistance

In today’s fast-paced society, embracing a rhythm of rest is an act of resistance against cultural norms that equate busyness with success. The relentless drive for achievement can lead to burnout and disconnection from God. By intentionally setting aside time for rest, Christians resist the pressures of modern life and affirm their commitment to God’s design. John Piper warns that failing to rest can lead to idolatry—becoming so consumed by tasks that we neglect our need for renewal. Recognizing this danger compels believers to prioritize rest as an essential aspect of their spiritual journey.

Practical Ways to Incorporate Sabbath and Rest

Weekly Sabbaths

Many Christians who practice a weekly Sabbath testify to its benefits in orienting their lives toward God. Here are some practical suggestions:

24-Hour Rest Period: Dedicate one day each week where you set aside work in favor of worship, family time, and activities that bring joy and rejuvenation.

Family Traditions: Establish rituals around Sabbath observance—such as shared meals or communal worship—to foster connection with God and loved ones.

Monthly Retreats

Consider scheduling monthly retreats or getaways, either alone, with family, or with a small group from church. Stepping away from the busyness of life to focus on God’s Word and engage in fellowship can be deeply refreshing.

Annual Renewal

Taking an extended retreat once a year—preferably to a new location—can be a valuable practice. Visiting mission stations and engaging with missionaries can provide a fresh perspective on God’s work in different parts of the world. Such breaks allow us to refocus, realign, and find new opportunities to contribute to God’s mission.

The spiritual rhythm of rest is integral to Christian living. It is not merely a command but an invitation to a deeper relationship with God. By embracing rest as a vital component of life—rooted in biblical principles—we cultivate resilience against the pressures of modernity while affirming our identity as children of God. As believers navigate the complexities of life, let us remember that true fulfillment does not come from relentless activity but from resting in Christ’s presence. In doing so, we honor God’s design for our lives and experience the wholeness He desires for us—a wholeness marked by peace, joy, and renewed purpose. May we learn to rest as Jesus did, trusting that in stillness, we find strength for the journey ahead.

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By intentionally setting aside time for rest, Christians resist the pressures of modern life and affirm their commitment to God’s design.

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POEM

GUIDE ME LORD

Janis Ann Philip

*Hold me, O Lord, when I tumble and fall.
Save me, Lord, from my very own flaws.
Cover me, Lord, when the world makes me tremble,
And protect my faith,
When it starts to stumble.
Give me Your light O Lord,
When the darkness blinds me,
And show me the perfect way,
You've chosen to lead me.
Provide me with strength,
To carry my cross,
And wisdom, to follow Your laws.
Make me grow,
In the power of Your name,
And teach me to show Your Love,
To this world,
That forgot how You Loved.*

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THE INDWELLING

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM

The New Testament epistles teach that the Holy Spirit indwells every child of God. This fact is referred to three times in Romans chapter 8, verses 9 and 11. The indwelling is true about every child of God. There is no division among the believers as have and have-nots, as far as the indwelling of the Spirit is concerned. The Holy Spirit indwells all. “Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (v.9). The scripture makes it clear that all three Persons in the Trinity, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, dwell in each believer (Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 1:27). This blessing is the blessing of the church age. The Old Testament saints did not have this blessing. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, or Solomon did not have this blessing. Even a person like David had to pray to God that He would not take His Spirit from him. A New Testament believer need not make such a prayer. Jesus Christ told us that the Spirit is with us forever (John 14:16). For all the ministries of the Spirit in this age, which is sometimes termed the age of the Spirit, the indwelling is the foundation. This indwelling is not the same as omnipresence. But it is His presence within the believer in all authority and affection.

The blessings of this indwelling are the following.

Firstly, indwelling assures the completion of redemption.

Paul says, “And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (vv. 10, 11).

When the apostle says, ‘the Spirit is life,’ it is better to take the ‘Spirit’ here with the meaning of the human spirit. It is life, which means it has emerged into life from death. But the body is dead due to sin. But a child of God can be sure about the body’s redemption because of the Spirit’s indwelling. Though a believer can claim that he is fully saved, the experience of redemption is in stages. The spirit is fully saved. The soul is being saved. But the body is still to be saved. It shall occur only when the Lord comes. The indwelling of the Spirit gives this assurance.

Secondly, the Spirit gives victory over the flesh.

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (vv. 12, 13).

The ‘flesh’ is the sinful nature. Even after a person is born again, though the divine nature is added, the old Adamic, sinful nature continues. It is contrary to the work of the Spirit in the believer (Galatians 5:16, 17; James 1:13-16). With the help of the Spirit, one must put to death the deeds of flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). The Spirit gives victory over the enticement of the flesh.

John R W Stott says, “There is a kind of life which leads to death, and there is a kind of death which leads to life.”

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For all the ministries of the Spirit in this age, which is sometimes termed the age of the Spirit, the indwelling is the foundation.

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Thirdly, the Spirit guides us.

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (v. 14).

This verse says that the Spirit guides all those who belong to God. Paul says, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:16). The picture here is of a little child who cannot walk by itself. It holds the hand of its parent and walks. Similarly, a believer cannot live by himself. He needs help to proceed. The Spirit helps in this matter. He leads God’s children. The Lord said that the Spirit is the Spirit of truth and that He would guide believers into all the truths.

Fourthly, the Spirit is the Spirit of adoption.

“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’” (v. 15).

A believer is not only born from above into the family of God, but he is also adopted into the family of God. While the term ‘born again’ denotes the imparting of God’s life to a person who believes, adoption points to the inheritance and blessings that come to a person by faith. The assurance of the inheritance is the presence of the Spirit within. Thus, He is called the Spirit of adoption. This helps us to call God “Abba Father.” These are Aramaic and Grecian words for ‘father.’ The believers from both these sections, Jews, whose language is Aramaic, and Grecians, whose language is Greek, all call Him Father. This call indicates the confidence with which the children of God approach the presence of God.

Fifthly, the Spirit bears witness within, vv. 16,17.

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (vv. 16, 17).

The Spirit that indwells the believers witnesses within them that they are the children of God when temptations or sufferings arise. When there are temptations to do wrong, the Spirit within dissuades them by reminding them that they are God’s children. When there are sufferings, and when they become discouraged, the Spirit encourages them by reminding them of their relationship to God, that they are the children of God. This witnessing within assures the believers that they are the children of God. The children then await being glorified together with the Lord.

These truths about the indwelling of the Spirit show the unique blessings and care the believers enjoy in their earthly sojourn.

PATRICK, MISSIONARY TO IRELAND

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM

Patrick was born in Britain around the late 4th or early 5th century, possibly at Kilpatrick in Scotland. At that time, the Romans were ruling Britain. The reliable sources of information about him are his autobiography, *Confessio*, and *Epistola* (Letter to the soldiers of Coroticus). Historians classify other (and later) writings about him as “hagiography”—deliberately written to arouse religious feelings and, therefore, of doubtful authenticity.

His birth name was Maewyn Succat, and he came from a well-respected Romanized family. His father, Calpurnius, was a deacon, and his grandfather, Potitus, was a priest. Patrick must have heard the word of God preached when he was young, but he had no interest in it.

At the age of 16, his life changed dramatically when Irish raiders attacked his village and kidnapped him. They took him to Ireland and sold him as a slave to one of the influential citizens there. His new master made him tend flocks near the modern town of Ballymena. He gradually learned the Irish language. In Ireland, as Patrick suffered from loneliness and hardship, “the Lord opened up my awareness of my lack of faith. I recognised my failings. So I turned with all my heart to the Lord my God, and he looked down on my lowliness and had mercy on my youthful ignorance.”

Patrick began to spend more and more time in prayer. “I tended sheep every day, and I prayed frequently during the day. More and more the love of God increased, and my sense of awe before God. I even remained in the woods and on the mountain, and I would rise to pray before dawn in snow and ice and rain... the spirit was burning in me at that time.”

After six years of slavery, Patrick heard a voice saying to him: “Very soon you will return to your native country... Look – your ship is ready.”. So Patrick ran away from his enslaver. When he came to the coast, he found a ship ready to leave. The captain was hostile to him initially but let him sail. They landed in a remote part of Britain and ran out of food as they tried to make their way to an inhabited place. Patrick says the captain turned to him: “What about this, Christian? You tell us that your God is great and all-powerful – why can’t you pray for us, since we’re in a bad state with hunger? There’s no sign of us finding a human being anywhere!” Patrick says he replied with some confidence: “Turn in faith with all your hearts to the Lord my God, because nothing is impossible for him, so that he may put food in your way – even enough to make you fully satisfied! He has an abundance everywhere.”

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Soon, to everyone’s amazement, they came across a herd of pigs, which they killed and ate. Later, they found honey and other forest produce. After a few years of searching, Patrick was able to reunite with his parents. They requested that he never leave them again.

Some years later, he had a dream or vision in the night in which an Irish man delivered him a letter titled ‘The Voice of the Irish’; as he was reading it, he heard many Irish people saying, “We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us.” Wondering if this was from God, he heard a voice on another night, “The one who gave his life for you, he it is who speaks to you.”

We must note that pagan Ireland was a tough place for missionary work (although there may have been a few Christians there before Patrick came). The idolatrous polytheistic Celtic religion had elaborate rites, including human sacrifice, and its priestly class, the Druids, was in no mood to release its hold on the people. The climate was harsh and the people were violent, so even the mighty Romans didn’t bother trying to conquer it.

Patrick went to study the Bible under mentors in Gaul (France), and then returned to Ireland. His initial reception was hostile, but he managed to find a welcoming place in northern Ireland. He had a fruitful ministry, leading many people to Christ. Of particular mention are a few people related to the kings ruling there, a few noble women, and many slaves and poor people. He suffered great hardship and persecution.

On one occasion, the king of Ireland wanted to celebrate a pagan feast - this involved lighting a special fire. The king ordered that no one else should light a fire for a certain period until he lit his fire at his palace. In defiance of the king’s order, Patrick lighted a fire. Patrick stood firm in the confrontation that followed between him and the Druids and the king, and God protected him from their attacks. Patrick won the respect of the king and he permitted Patrick to preach throughout the land.

Patrick made a trip to mainland Europe, during which he faced accusations from his superiors who belonged to the (then evolving) Roman Catholic hierarchy. His Confession is written to defend himself. He insists that he did not take any money to baptize people and that he refused generous payments from the noble women who he influenced for Christ. Thousands came to follow Christ, and gradually, the earlier paganism disappeared.

Patrick writes about God as follows: “there is no other God, nor will there ever be, nor was there ever, except God the Father. He is the one who was not begotten, the one without a beginning, the one from whom all beginnings come, the one who holds all things in being...his son, Jesus Christ, whom we testify has always been, since before the beginning of this age, with the Father in a spiritual way...Everything we can see, and everything beyond our sight, was made through him. He became a human being; and, having overcome death, was welcomed to the heavens to the Father, who gave him all power over every being, both heavenly and earthly and beneath the earth. Let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ, in whom we believe and whom we await to come back to us in the near future, is Lord and God. He is judge of the living and of the dead; he rewards every person according to their deeds. He has generously poured on us the Holy Spirit, the gift and promise of immortality, who makes believers and those who listen to be children of God and co-heirs with Christ. This is the one we acknowledge and adore – one God in a trinity of the sacred name.”

According to legend, Patrick used the shamrock, a three-leaved plant, to explain the Trinity to the Irish. Tradition also credits him with banishing snakes from Ireland. Since snakes never inhabited Ireland, Christian historians think this may symbolize Patrick’s triumph over the Druids, who had demonic influences.

Patrick lived when access to the Bible was scarce, and only a few people were literate. The emerging Roman Catholic Church no doubt influenced Patrick. He seems to have believed in asceticism and some form of church hierarchy, but he quotes extensively from scripture, and we can safely assume that he preached the true gospel. He died after spending about 40 years ministering in Ireland. The Irish celebrate St Patrick’s Day on 17th March. It is now a cultural festival, part of Irish identity.

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OH, THE DEEP-DEEP LOVE OF JESUS

SHEBA CHANI

*Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus, Vast, unmeasured,
boundless, free
Rolling as a mighty ocean, In its fullness over me
Underneath me, all around me, Is the current of His
love*

*Leading onward, leading homeward to, Thy glorious
rest above*

Samuel Trevor Francis, the son of an artist, was born at Cheshunt, Herts, in 1835 and was a merchant by trade. He was raised by a godly mother and grandmother, who used the Bible as a textbook to teach him to read. He remembers his mother praying that her sons would grow up to be God-fearing men. Although Samuel attended church services regularly with his family and sang with the choir, he was not born again. As he grew older, his father arranged for him to be an apprentice with a medical doctor. He remained there for 12 years, after which his father passed away, and Samuel dropped out of the program. He stayed with his uncle in Hull, where he met Mr Akester, a chemist leading youth Bible studies. There, Samuel was exposed to clear gospel preaching.

One winter night, Francis was on his way back to London. As he walked across the Hungerford Bridge over the River Thames, he paused and stared downward into the depths of the river below. He felt so lonely that he contemplated plunging into the icy waters and ending everything. But instead, John 3:3 came into his mind: “Truly, truly, I say unto you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Francis repented, and this reformation of heart prompted him to begin writing poetry and lyrics. One of the songs that came from this was “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus.”

This song originally had four verses, but since it first appeared in The Song Companion to the Scriptures in 1911, people have typically shortened it to three. The text echoes the Apostle Paul’s description of the strength required to “comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, length, height, and depth” of the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:18)—the picture of a limitless ocean.

The ocean’s depths are a frequent metaphor for God’s immensity when we acknowledge its vastness and our limited knowledge of it. Samuel Francis used this imagery to portray Jesus’ love. Only the greater depths of Jesus’ love were able to overwhelm the rivers of depression experienced by the teenage Francis. The love of Jesus is immense and active in pursuing the sinner: “Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love.” The second stanza (usually excluded) points to the incarnation of this ocean of love in the person of Jesus Christ. The next stanza responds to this love: “Spread His praise from shore to shore.” The final stanza envisions the believer ascending into “An ocean vast of blessings, a heav’n of heav’ns to me.”

After being born again, Samuel searched for a home assembly and found a church like the one he attended in Hull. He went on to join the Moody and Sankey London campaign in 1873-1874 as their singing director. Later in life, a partial loss of sight prompted him to embark on a sea voyage. This voyage later became a world tour covering Canada, Australia, Palestine, Egypt, and other parts of North Africa. Francis spent 73 years of his life in ministry, and in December 1925, at age 92, he went to be with the Lord. The hymn was originally set to the tune Evening Blessing, but it is most commonly set to the Welsh tune Ebenezer, composed by Thomas John Williams (1869-1944) in 1890. The music’s deep swelling rolls over and again, giving the effect of being washed within the ocean’s current. The song reminds us of the immensity of the love of God poured out for the Church in Jesus Christ. The oft-excluded second verse shows us that love, “I, a wrecked and ruined creature, / Sinful, helpless, all defiled; / But the love of God in Jesus, / Made me God’s beloved child.” What a privilege it is in worship to contemplate the incomprehensible immensity of God’s love in Christ that “lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee.”

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This reformation of heart prompted him to begin writing poetry and lyrics. One of the songs that came from this was “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus.”

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<https://austinbhebe.wordpress.com/hymns-directory/redeeming-love/o-the-deep-deep-love-of-jesus/>

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GOSPEL

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAMS

The question of what it means to be human is an age-old philosophical inquiry that has garnered multifaceted responses from thinkers across generations. Neuroscience and psychology have contributed significantly to understanding human nature, yet they fail to address the most profound realities of our existence. Despite all advancements, humanity remains bound to its depravity, unable to ascend beyond its fallen state. The corruption of humankind is increasingly evident in the narratives of our daily lives and in the grim headlines of national and international news. Just when we believe we have witnessed the pinnacle of evil, another atrocity emerges, surpassing the last. No amount of philosophy, science, or self-awareness can fully explain—or remedy—the condition of the human heart. The Holy Bible declares unequivocally that “the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). No depth of introspection or self-improvement can alter this condition. Humanity needs an external force, a divine intervention, to effect true transformation.

But who can redeem such wretched souls? Is there anyone untouched by the same corruption that plagues us all? We need someone who has walked this earth yet remained unstained by its sin—one who endured evil yet responded with unfailing love. History and Scripture point to only one such figure: Jesus Christ. Often, people dwell on His death and resurrection while overlooking the significance of His life. Yet the Bible speaks volumes about how He lived. As the eternal Son of God, He took on human nature for the redemption of humankind. Born of a virgin, raised by imperfect parents, and surrounded by sinful men, Jesus remained sinless. Though He faced temptation, He never yielded. Though He provoked anger by exposing hypocrisy, He never sought to defend Himself through force or rebellion. Instead, Scripture tells us that “He learned obedience through suffering” (Hebrews 5:8). The Son of God—fully divine and fully human—suffered, bled, and died, yet remained without sin.

In Jesus, we see the true embodiment of what it means to be human. God created humankind in His image, intending us to reflect His character and live to our full divine potential. But through disobedience, humanity lost that privilege. Yet Christ, the only begotten Son of God, lived the life that no man could live. Through His death and resurrection, He extends an invitation to partake in His life—to rediscover what it truly means to be human by living in communion with God rather than rebelling against Him. Dear reader, if you find yourself searching for meaning in life, I urge you to consider Jesus. He alone can restore the brokenness within and transform the wicked heart. His invitation stands open to all who will receive Him—who will repent of their sins and accept Him as Lord and Savior. Will you accept His call?

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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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