



The Big Questions



Testimony –
Melanie Thomassian



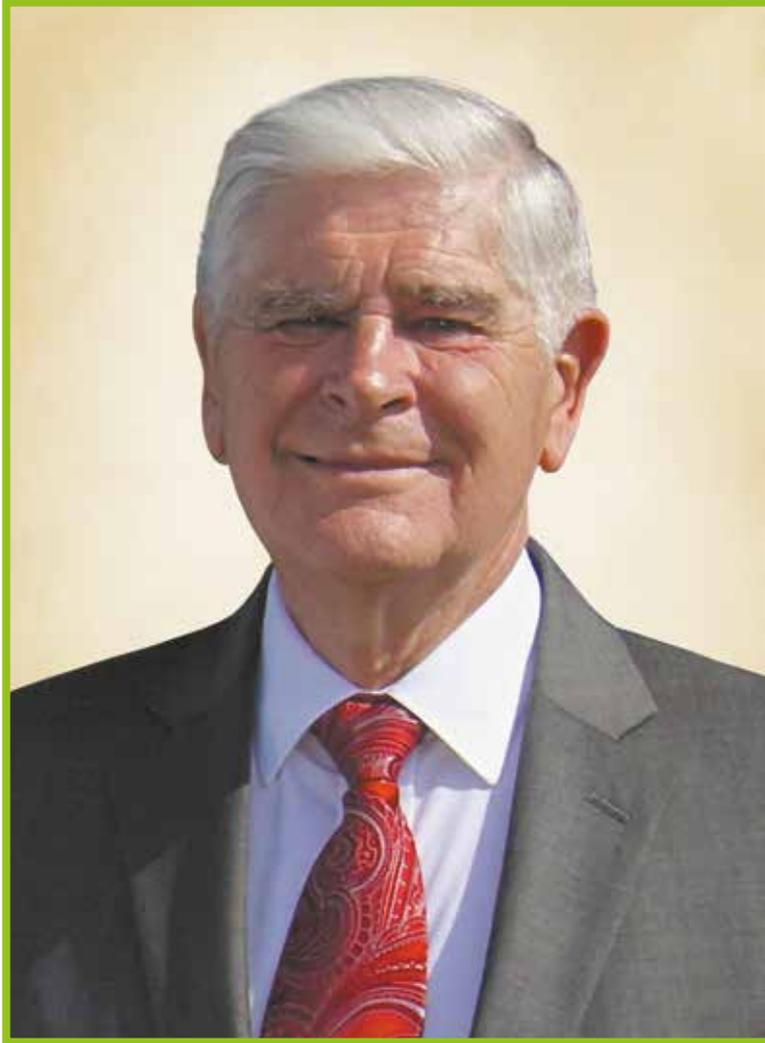
Missionary
Focus –
India



What Is
the Purpose
of Life? –
**Raymond
Robinson**

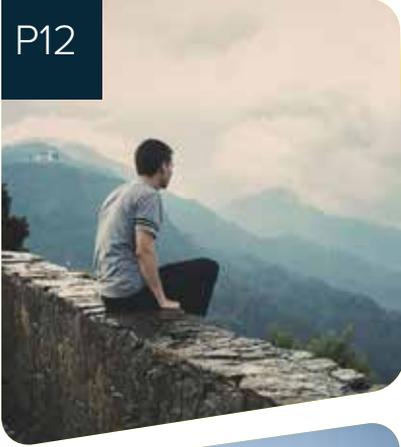


Editorial

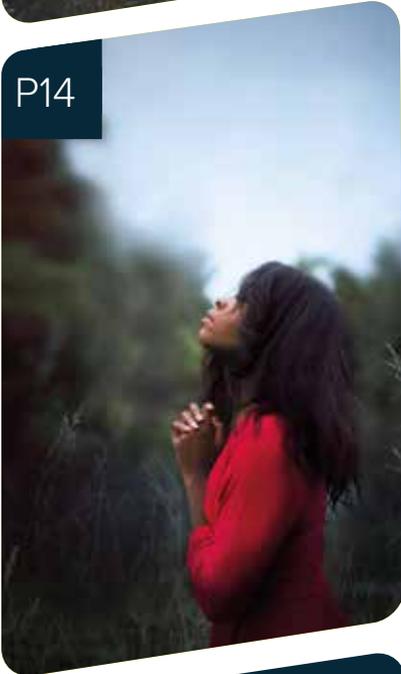


In loving memory of Dr Alan Cairns

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The Big Questions

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Publishing Data
Published by
Let the Bible Speak
11 Westland Avenue,
Ballymoney,
Northern Ireland, BT53 6PE

Convener : Leslie Curran
Editor : Ryan McKee
Email : editor@ltbs.tv
Editorial Assistant:
Mary Christopher
Design & layout: OasisDesign.co.uk
Printed by JC Print Ltd.
Email : info@jcprint.net

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Let the Bible Speak is the radio ministry of the
Free Presbyterian Church worldwide.
www.ltbs.tv, www.ltbsradio.com, www.freepres.org



WE OFFER OUR SINCERE SYMPATHY

With deep sorrow we mourn the passing of Dr Alan Cairns. His was a ministry of many parts, and each one he exercised to the glory of God.

His vision to preach the Word and so proclaim Christ to a perishing world led him, under God, to pursue the formation of Let the Bible Speak, the radio ministry of the Free Presbyterian Church. He continued his unstinting support of it, giving wise counsel and sound advice as the work continued to grow and include a television outreach. As the resident preacher on radio in its formative years, his Spirit-anointed preaching, profound Bible knowledge, and immense theological insight were blessed to a world-wide congregation of thousands. He exalted Christ, exhorting his listeners to

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” and always placing an emphasis on the value of the Saviour’s blood.

Numerous books and booklets came from his pen, supplying a great need for sound literature. His booklet *Christ Is the Answer*, later enlarged and published as *A New Beginning*, has been sent to countless radio listeners over the years and helped so many in our congregations too.

The Lord has called him home to be where Christ is. Our great loss is his infinite gain.

On behalf of the Let the Bible Speak Committee we extend our sincere sympathy to Mrs Cairns and son Frank and family, and assure them of our prayerful remembrance.

“I, even I, am he that comforteth you”
(Isaiah 51:12).

Leslie Curran

Programme director of LTBS in Northern Ireland and Convener of the LTBS Committee.



Missionary Focus – INDIA

The COVID-19 lockdowns seem to have helped in bringing many gospel ministries online and extending the reach of ministers to remote locations across the nation. The lockdowns have also given us more time to look into our relationship with the Lord. Since April 2020, the church has not been gathering together in person as of the date of this writing. We have kept in touch over the phone during these months.

Ravi has been involved in personal evangelistic work and preaching on alternate Sundays in a nearby small house group led by a brother named Ben. Ravi continues to work in the field of computer science and is thankful for the work on hand during this COVID-19 time.

Several ministers from Northern Ireland, along with Ravi and Deepanker, were involved in online meetings with a group of pastors in India to minister in pastoral topics in the month of August 2020. The topics covered were counselling sinners, importance of pastoral visitation, counselling backsliders, pastors' duty of watching over their own lives, comforting the bereaved, and dealing with discouragement in the congregation and in the pastor's own life.

Prayer Points:

- Pray for opportunities to minister the gospel and for the Spirit of God to bring people to Himself. Also, that the Word of God may have free course in this vast land.

- For COVID-19 to continue to subside and for the congregation to be able to meet up for services.

- That the Lord would touch the hearts of the orphans being helped and that their eyes would be opened to look beyond their material needs and understand their need for a Saviour.

- That the Lord would send us more encouragers to help us provide and support the work in eastern, northeastern, and central India. One of the biggest challenges that the mission fields here face is lack of personnel. Please pray that the Lord of the harvest would stir and unsettle the hearts of young people developing an interest in the things of God, and that young people would have the desire to witness.

- That the Lord would deepen our burden for perishing souls and enable us to preach and teach the whole counsel of God's Word.

Praise Points:

- We praise God for keeping us in good health and for recovery from COVID-19 for Ravi's mother and Deepanker's mother-in-law.

- For giving us the privilege



to serve and provide for 140 orphans and semi-orphans in the state of Orissa in some little ways.

- We thank the Lord for mission-minded medical doctors who have come alongside us to provide free medical care to the orphans and their family members.

- We also thank God for granting us the blessing of partnering and fellowshiping with pastors and missionaries serving in various remote parts of India. We have received new opportunities in other northeastern and northern states.

- Thank God for enabling us to help pastors and missionaries from a tribal background with Scripture-centered teaching. Our singular focus over the years has been to emphasize the authority of Scriptures, to encourage the pastors to walk in the paths of God's Word, and to equip them to proclaim old truth that glorifies our triune God.

We want to take this opportunity to thank God's people for their prayer support.

What Is the Purpose of Life?



Eleanor Roosevelt said, “The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.”

This would be the view of many; however, the purpose of life goes much deeper. To get the true purpose of life we need to start at the beginning.

As you have opened this magazine you will have noted the illustration on the front cover, the order of the pages, the words that are printed on them, and the layout of the articles. Without even thinking, you have correctly assumed that there was a designer. So when we come to consider life in our world, and especially human life, we have to recognise that there is a Creator-God, one who fashioned this body which can walk, talk, think, and reason.

In grasping the reality of a Creator, we then understand

that our existence in this world is not a random act. We are special and unique and possess a soul of eternal value. Such is our worth and value before God that His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, gave His life and shed His blood on the cross that we as sinners might be pardoned and know eternal life.

Not only is He the Giver of life, but He is the Sustainer of life in that He provides all that is needful for you and me to live in this world.

God gave life to our first parents, and with that life came authority (Genesis 1:26), activity (Genesis 2:15), and accountability (Genesis 2:16, 17). So it is with us. The

life that we possess is a gift from God, and His desire is that we live it unto Him.

To fulfil this purpose, we must –

Know God

There must be that recognition that there is a God who formed this world – one God who is infinite in power; who is truth, knowledge, and wisdom. It is He alone who has the power to create life.

Not only is He the Giver of life, but He is the Sustainer of life in that He provides all that is needful for you and me to live in this world. The apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 1:16–17, “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”

Many hold a view of God that He is full of love and mercy, and this is correct, but He is also a God of justice and holiness. The love of God cannot be isolated from the justice of God, and this is clear in His dealing with sin.

God is holy, and so the prophet Habakkuk writes of Him, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (1:13). To know God is to accept that we are sinful creatures and therefore under His wrath and judgment. Condemned and unclean, we see God’s love in that His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, bore the punishment of our sin on the cross that we might be forgiven.

In knowing God, we are aware of His goodness and our guilt. As such, our only hope is to come with repentance of sin and in faith, trusting only in the atoning work of Christ for eternal salvation.

Love God

God said to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 6:5, “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” This same truth is emphasized by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 22:37.

This is what God expects of His creatures. For some,

their love of God may be motivated by what God has done for them – the business is going well, the disease has been cured, life is good. In essence it is not God that they love but rather His blessings. This is selfishness, because if blessing stops, then we stop loving God.

Instead, our love for God should be that we delight to be in His presence. We love to commune with Him in prayer; we love to read His Word. In truth, our love for God cannot be what it ought to be unless we have first experienced His salvation. John the apostle sums it up with these words: “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Serve God

The Westminster Confession of Faith commences its Shorter Catechism with this question:

What is the chief end of man?
Answer. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.

The Lord Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry chose the disciples from differing backgrounds and with differing abilities, yet He gave them all the same command: to witness and to preach (Mark 16:15). The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

In knowing God, we are aware of His goodness and our guilt. As such, our only hope is to come with repentance of sin and in faith, trusting only in the atoning work of Christ for eternal salvation.

Therefore, our purpose in life is to know God and enjoy His salvation. Our life is to be one of witness, of warning, and of service unto God. And we are to show forth the holiness, love, and grace of Christ in all that we do and say.



Raymond Robinson
*is minister of
Kesh Free Presbyterian
Church, Northern
Ireland.*

Why Is Sin a Problem?



Behind the question in the title of this article is a clear statement: Sin is a problem. Sin is not just a problem; it is the biggest problem a man will ever encounter in this life. Whatever problems you are facing just now – however difficult, distressing, or long-standing – they pale in comparison to the problem of your sin. Why is sin, your sin, such a big problem?

First, sin is a serious problem because, in its essence, it is disobedience to God. The Bible describes the criminal nature of sin. The word sin speaks of having “missed the mark”, the mark of perfectly obeying God’s law. The Bible declares that “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4) or, more literally, “sin is lawlessness”. Therefore, sin is a real problem not because you have accidentally missed or erred from the path God wants you to be on, but because you have wilfully and wantonly broken His law.

The fact that you have

sinned without any regard to the consequences reveals another reason that sin is your biggest problem: sin is deceptive. God speaks of “the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13) and of “deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:22). Such is the ability of sin to deceive that many have convinced themselves that they can live in adultery or fornication, practice homosexuality, be a drunkard, be a perpetual liar, etc., and still go to heaven when they die. Nothing could be further from the truth! Before proclaiming that such sinners will not inherit the kingdom of God, the apostle Paul says, “Be not deceived” (1 Corinthians 6:9). The sobering and chilling reality

The sobering and chilling reality is that sin, through deception, has the power to conceal itself in your heart.

is that sin, through deception, has the power to conceal itself in your heart.

The third reason sin is your greatest problem is that it keeps you in its dungeon. Make no mistake. You do not have a “free will” that enables you to break off your habits of sin any time you choose. Your sin has an ironclad grip on your mind, soul, and body that you cannot break. When it comes to obeying God’s law and living a life that pleases Him, the Lord says that “the carnal mind [the heart bound by sin] is ... not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Romans 8:7). Try as you might, you cannot turn over a new leaf, change your ways, or just decide that things are going to be different from here on out. As the old hymn puts it, you are “held by Satan’s captive chains.”

Sin is also your biggest problem because it is so destructive. In Galatians 5, the apostle Paul says that “the works of the flesh”, i.e., sin, are not only “adultery,

fornication, uncleanness”, etc., but also “hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife”. Sin is destructive to relationships at every level, to joy and happiness, and to any peace of heart. Because your sin is at war with God, it makes you at war with others and with yourself. The sins of anger, jealousy, hatred, covetousness, and so many others have destroyed your capacity to love as God would have you love and to experience the joy, peace, and contentment that come to those who discover the answer to their sin problem.

Where you spend eternity will be determined by whether your sin problem was solved before you died.

The final reason sin is your greatest problem is that if you do not accept God’s answer to sin, it will lead to your full and eternal damnation. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). You will die one day because when sin entered the world through Adam’s disobedience, “death passed upon all men” (Romans 5:12). In whatever way you meet your end, meet it you will,

for “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Immediately upon death, your soul will be judged by God and either taken to heaven to dwell with Him for eternity or sent to hell to suffer the darkness and misery of the damned. Where you spend eternity will be determined by whether your sin problem was solved before you died. Has your sin problem been solved yet?

Remember, you cannot solve your sin problem yourself. Only Jesus Christ can do that. Your sin has made you unacceptable to God, but Christ made a way for you to be “without sin”, righteous in His sight and forever accepted as one of His children. Christ lived the sinless life you could never live. He suffered and died on the cross to be punished for the sins of others so that they would not have to be punished for them. He rose again from the dead on the third day, revealing that He accomplished that purpose through His death.

All that remains for the sinner to do – for you to do – to find the answer to your sin problem is to recognize your lost, sinful state, turn your back on your life of sin, and come to Jesus Christ by faith, believing that He alone can pardon you and deal with your greatest problem. Do this and you will be saved

Your sin has made you unacceptable to God, but Christ made a way for you to be “without sin”, righteous in His sight and forever accepted as one of His children.

from your sin and brought into the family of God. This is what the gospel is all about. Jesus is waiting for you to come to Him just as you are. Will you not come? He Himself has promised, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).



John Wagner

has recently retired from the pastorate, having ministered in Covenant Free Presbyterian Church, South Carolina, United States of America.



How Can I Be Sure of Heaven?

There was a time you and I were not, but there never will be a time when we will cease to exist. Our time on earth is brief; eternity is forever. Therefore, we need to make sure that after physical death we will be in heaven and not in hell.

Some, very confident of entrance into heaven, will tragically hear the awful words from the Saviour, “I never knew you: depart from me” (Matthew 7:23). There are churches that not only deny one can be sure of heaven but denounce such a claim as a heinous sin of presumption. Most people have a hope or wish they will be in heaven but do not know for certain. As a result, they have no peace in the face of death.

Can we really be sure? The Bible clearly states you can and ought to know with absolute certainty. For instance, John wrote his first epistle “that ye may know

that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

How can I be sure?

Not by Religion

A popular view in our modern pluralist society is that just as “all roads lead to Rome”, so all religions lead to God and heaven. Being religious is all that is required, and it is left to you to choose which religion to follow. Such a view is foolish. Religions contradict each other, so all cannot be right. More importantly, the Bible states that Jesus Christ is not just a way, or even the best way, but the only way to heaven. Christ declared that no one could come to God

the Father except through Him (John 14:6). Peter declared, “Neither is there salvation in any other” (Acts 4:12).

Some wrongly imagine that they are on the path to heaven because they factually believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and they nominally adhere to the Christian religion. They think that having connections to a Christian church, being baptised, and attending now and again, is all that is necessary to be accepted by God into heaven. There is not one single verse in the Bible that backs up church membership as an avenue into heaven.

Those who assume their religious activities alone will get them to heaven have a terrible surprise ahead.

I will never forget speaking with a critically ill, elderly lady in hospital who related how she had faithfully attended church services, received the various sacraments, and participated in church activities, but with tears told me, “I wish I knew my sins were forgiven and I was

going to heaven.” Those who assume their religious activities alone will get them to heaven have a terrible surprise ahead.

Not by My Righteousness

Some who readily agree that heaven is not attained by religious observance will dogmatically state it is by living a “good life”.

Their hope is that on judgment day their good works will outweigh any bad deeds they committed. A popular view is that only very wicked individuals who commit the vilest of crimes will be refused entrance into heaven. Salvation is viewed as performance driven, and they just hope that when they die, they have been good enough to be admitted into heaven. Such a popular misconception is extremely sinful in God’s eyes. It displays a complete ignorance of the heinous nature of sin and the holiness of Almighty God. It is an insult to God the Son. If anyone could make it to God by good works, then why was there the need for Christ to die on the cross?

Bible writers maintain again and again that there is no righteous deed we can do that will earn us a place in heaven: Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:9; Titus 3:5. In order to get into heaven (which means living in the presence of a morally perfect God who abhors evil), one must be

perfectly righteous. One sin is sufficient to bar entrance to heaven (James 2:10). Viewed in comparison to God’s absolute holiness, our very best righteous acts are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

Jesus took upon Himself, on the cross, the hell that we deserve, so we could experience for eternity the heaven we do not deserve!

I can be sure!

By Reliance upon Christ

When we realise that we cannot be reconciled to the holy God by our good works or our religious observance, we are ready to receive the gospel (the good news) about Christ and what He has accomplished for sinners like us.

That good news is that which the holy God demands for entrance into heaven: a perfect righteousness. He has provided this in Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ lived that perfect righteous life we could never live, and at Calvary, God laid upon Him, the Righteous One, our unrighteousness, “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”

(2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus took upon Himself, on the cross, the hell that we deserve, so we could experience for eternity the heaven we do not deserve!

The gospel by its very nature produces assurance of heaven, because you are not depending on anything you have done. You are relying on His finished work.

Genuine believers can have doubts through looking for assurance to a past prayer they offered, or a past experience. Assurance of heaven is yours right now, if you are relying solely upon Jesus Christ and what He has accomplished through His righteous life, death, and resurrection to make you acceptable before God.

The question for you to answer is, am I?



Ron Johnstone

has retired from the pastorate, having ministered in Newtownards Free Presbyterian Church, Northern Ireland.



How Can I Know God's Will for My Life?

There can be no better place for a person to be than in the centre of God's will for their life. Paul describes the will of God for the child of God as being "good, and acceptable, and perfect" (Romans 12:1, 2).

The will of God should be the primary concern for every Christian. Our Lord taught us to pray, "Our Father ... Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9–10). Sadly, many who profess to know the Lord care little about God's plans and purposes for their lives and for the world in general. Many are taken up with their own desires and aspirations and only seek the Lord when they find themselves in trouble.

Others view God's will as some mysterious thing that is revealed in some abstract way. Still others flippantly state when assuming a course of action, "God told me ..." and often misrepresent the Lord and take His name in vain by doing their own thing and

The will of God should be the primary concern for every Christian.

rubber-stamping it with something that sounds spiritual.

Can Christians really know what God's will is for their lives? Yes, they can. The Bible affirms it. Moreover, there can be no greater joy than finding, following, and fulfilling God's will for your life.

Let me outline a few steps in seeking to discern the will of God.

1. SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

It is absolutely imperative that in seeking the mind of God we come first and foremost to the Bible. The psalmist said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). The Holy Spirit will

never lead someone contrary to what He has already said in the Holy Scriptures. Untold damage has been done by people going outside of the Word of God in this area.

We must take the Bible as a whole and complete unit. Some are concerned with knowing divine guidance with the "big decisions" in life – marriage, employment, etc. – yet have little regard as to what the Bible says regarding day-to-day matters of obedience. God's will is just as important for the "small things" as it is for the "big things". It is God's will for all of us that we be obedient, that we pray, witness, be part of a local church, study the Word of God, pursue holiness, and honour Him with our substance. Very often when we see to the things that are clearly revealed, the Lord will make known the other things.

2. SURRENDER YOUR OWN WILL

When our Lord was in Gethsemane before going

to the cross, he prayed, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

He was coming before His Father in an attitude of absolute surrender to His will. It can be no different for the Christian. Paul said in Romans 12, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." In light of Calvary and what the Saviour did for us, it is entirely reasonable that we yield our all to Him. He died not only to redeem our souls, but also our very bodies. We are bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

It was C. T. Studd who said, "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him." It is lamentable that so many professing Christians view salvation merely as a ticket to heaven or a get-out-of-jail-free card rather than a reconciliation to God so that we can glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

3. LEARN TO READ PROVIDENCE

God is Lord of all things. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without your Father. He who governs the minutest details in the universe can

surely be trusted to guide your steps into His plan for your life.

We must learn to trust Him to open and close doors and make His way plain before us. If you wonder if He wants you to go through a particular door, then pray about it. Pray that He will open it widely or close it tightly accordingly. We do not need to manipulate things or orchestrate events to give Him "a helping hand".

We must learn to trust Him to open and close doors and make His way plain before us.

If you are purposed to obey the Scriptures, yield your life to Him and do His will, and then He will see to the rest. God will always reveal His will to those who are willing to do it.

When the doors do not open and the circumstances do not fall into place, then it ultimately becomes clear that God is showing us that something is not His will for us. Similarly, He equips us for and enables us to do those things which He has planned for us. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

4. LET THE PEACE OF GOD RULE IN YOUR HEART

Paul nailed this principle down in Colossians 3:15. It is a very important verse. While the will of God is good, acceptable, and perfect, it is not always easy. We might face it with fear and apprehension, but when we are being biblical about it, and our hearts are yielded to Him, and providence is pointing a certain direction, then I believe God will give us a peace about it all in our hearts.

The Holy Spirit promises to "guide us into all truth". He leads every true child of God (Romans 8:14), and He is also our Comforter. God promises to give us a peace and contentment about His will for our lives, and when there is no real inner spiritual peace, we must get before the Lord and ask Him to lead us in a plain path.

May God bless you and make His will clear to you.



Roger Higginson
*is minister of
Lisburn Free
Presbyterian Church,
Northern Ireland.*

What Does It Mean to Be Separated unto the Lord?



There are only two classes of people in this world. There are those who are Christian and follow the Lord, and those who do not. The question is, how far do they go in interaction with each other? The Christian answer is not found in philosophical or psychological arguments, no matter how attractive they may sound. We must go to the Bible, the charter of Christianity; it leaves no doubt. The doctrine and practice of biblical separation is clearly taught in 2 Corinthians 6:14–18.

A VOICE TO BE HEARD.

“Saith the Lord” (v. 17). Many voices clamour for the Christian’s attention. There are ministers, moralists, media, politicians, prelates, priests, popes, and many more who compete for your ear. But God has spoken. This Scripture commands our attention and obedience. Disobedience lies at the root of man’s fall. We do well to listen to and obey God’s Word.

A DISTINCTION TO BE MADE.

“Be ye separate” (v. 17). God Himself has made a clear-cut distinction between the godly and the ungodly, and He has instructed us to respect His dividing line. We are to separate from unholy people (“unbelievers”, v. 14), unholy practices (“unrighteousness”, v. 14), unholy pleasures (“darkness”, v. 14), unholy prophets (“Belial”, v. 15), unholy powers (infidels, v. 15), and unholy places (the temple of idols, v. 16). Notice that we are not to be “unequally yoked” with these.

What does it mean to be unequally yoked? Paul does not use a flock of sheep as an illustration, but cattle in a yoke. A yoke is a means whereby two entities are

We must go to the Bible, the charter of Christianity; it leaves no doubt.

joined together. Hence a marriage is a yoke; so is a business merger. These are legally binding yokes. What about work? Is that an unequal yoke? Everyone has a job and works for some company. Christians must work with unbelievers, but this is not really a yoke in the biblical sense. The worker is not yoked with management. The Bible teaches not to yoke an ox and an ass together – it would not be efficient any more than to have an airplane with a jet engine on one wing and a piston engine on the other. The plane would be going round in circles.

We are also to make a clear distinction between believers and unbelievers. The believer is chosen by God unto salvation and has been called unto His service. As such, he or she is my brother or sister in God’s family. But the professing Christian, like the minister I met who wasn’t sure if God existed, is obviously not a believer, and it would be wrong for me to sit under his ministry.

AN ACTION TO BE TAKEN.

“Wherefore come out from among them” (v. 17). The Lord makes it quite obvious what we are to do. His command is clear. He does not tell us to stay in fellowship with the ungodly, but we are to “come out from among them”. We are not to fellowship with unsaved ministers; we are not to support a modernist gospel. Paul describes it as “another gospel: which is not another” (Galatians 1:6–7). Note the words “another”. The first one is Heteros – another of a different kind, a false gospel. The second is Allos – another of the same kind, the real gospel.

Right doctrine leads to right living. We are to follow the righteous example of Christ. If we fellowship with the unclean, we will become unclean and encourage their erroneous ways.

Come out does not mean stay in. The wife of an elder in another church came to me concerned about separation. The Lord spoke to her from Micah 2:10: “Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted, it shall destroy

you.” Although there were pressures on her to stay in an apostate church, she and her husband obeyed God and were blessed. Some reason, is it not better to stay in and be a good influence? Not when God’s Word says, “Come out from among them.” Some have doubts whether or not to come out. I always work on the principle, “Give God the benefit of any doubt you may have.”

A PURITY TO BE MAINTAINED.

“Touch not the unclean thing” (v. 17). Christians are to maintain purity of doctrine and behaviour. It is acknowledged that complete agreement with anyone is impossible, even in the best of marriages. But in Christianity there should be agreement on the fundamentals of the faith. These include the Bible as the Word of God, the Trinity, the person of Christ, the person and divinity of the Holy Spirit, salvation by grace through the blood of Christ, etc. There can be no fellowship where these are denied.

Right doctrine leads to right living. We are to follow the righteous example of Christ. If we fellowship with the unclean, we will become unclean and encourage their erroneous ways. Remember, there is a difference between fellowship and friendship. We are to be friendly to all so that we can reach them with the gospel.

A BLESSING TO BE RECEIVED.

“I will receive you” (v. 17). Step boldly out for the Lord. There is a wonderful father-and-son relationship between God and us. He promises us that “them that honour me I will honour” (1 Samuel 2:30). While we are commanded not to be yoked with the ungodly, and therefore are to separate from them, let us remember that we are separated unto God. He receives us. He also sends us forth as the Holy Spirit separated “Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto [He] ... called them” (Acts 13:2).

The Lord is building His church, and each Christian is but a brick. God is the great Architect and Builder, working all things according to His own plan. It is necessary that we wait on Him for our instructions; He will direct us at the right time, to the right place, and with the right word.



Frank McClelland

has retired from the pastorate, having ministered in Toronto Free Presbyterian Church, Ontario, Canada.



Retired Minister Interview

“Can you share how you came to know the Lord as your personal Saviour?”

In May 1959, to commemorate the centenary of the great Ulster Revival of 1859, Ernie Allen had a team of American evangelists to conduct a series of special evangelistic meetings to mark the occasion. Among the team was a young Texan, Johnny Bisagno, a former dance-band musician who was now using his talents for the Lord. He was invited to conduct special evangelistic meetings at the Emmanuel Mission Hall, which was just across the road from our home.

My sister Winnie, already a Christian, invited me several times to the mission. To satisfy her I went, but sat at the rear of the hall, planning to slip out as soon as the meeting finished. However, I was captivated as the evangelist preached on the love of God and the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. As the preacher made a closing appeal the congregation sang “Just as I

Am”. I could not hold back. I unashamedly went forward to indicate my decision to trust Jesus Christ as my Saviour.

My former Sunday school teacher, John Phillips, invited me to read John 3:16, putting my own name in the text: “For God so loved Stanley Barnes, that He gave His only begotten Son, that if Stanley Barnes believeth in Him ...” I then confessed my sin to God and asked the Lord Jesus to come into my heart.

Winnie wept with joy. Her prayers were answered, and my life was changed.

“How did you come in contact with the Free Presbyterian Church?”

Soon after my conversion, I came under the influence and ministry of various men of God. I was challenged and blessed through the preaching of Rev. Bert Cooke at Mount Merrion and Dr Paisley’s powerful preaching at the Ravenhill church. His preaching was making a significant impact on Ulster. I not only warmed to his preaching but was also

greatly blessed when Pastor Willie Mullan conducted Bible studies at the Ravenhill church.

These servants of God left a mighty imprint on my heart and life. Furthermore, Dr Paisley’s weekly ministry and prayer times convinced me that I should make Ravenhill Free Presbyterian Church my spiritual home.

“How were you called to the ministry?”

While in hospital, I received a visit from Rev. Bert Cooke. During our conversation he indicated the importance of Christian priorities as expressed in Matthew 6:33: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God”. After he prayed, I re-dedicated my life to the Lord.

Soon afterwards, I listened to a succession of missionaries at the Easter Convention but felt there was no way I could ever serve God as those missionaries had done. At the same time, I did not want to recoil from anything that God might want me to do.

The answer to my musings came on Sunday morning when Dr Paisley preached on Psalm 78:9: "The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle." Dr Paisley leaned over the pulpit and called out, "Young man, will God write over the story of your life that you turned back in the day of battle, or will you go through with Him?"

Thank God I did not turn back. I sensed that God was calling me into Christian ministry, and at the end of that Sunday morning service, I quietly surrendered my life to the call of God.

"Outline some of the encouragements you enjoyed during your pastoral ministry."

I thank God for all the encouragers and encouragements during more than forty years in the ministry. Too often God's servants are under-encouraged, if not discouraged. I have always been encouraged and supported by my family. I also thank God for the elders, office-bearers, and congregations with whom I worked in the Mount Merrion and Hillsborough churches. In Hillsborough we were able to see through two major building programmes to accommodate the growing congregation. Beyond the construction of the two church buildings, it was even more encouraging to point many souls to faith in Jesus Christ, to see them grow in faith and some go into God's work.

One of the greatest encouragements of my life was meeting the late Pastor Eugen Groza in 1990 during a visit to Romania. We developed a very close personal friendship which led to a strong relationship between his church and ours. Through that relationship, we became very involved with and sponsors of the Deborah House Project in Timisoara that provides a haven for young women who have been abused.

"Can you share any humorous moments from that time?"

There are too many to mention. I remember how nervous I was at the first wedding I conducted. I was so concerned that I would do everything correctly, that I forgot to ask the congregation to be seated, even though my wife kept waving her hands and trying to signal to me. It certainly was a long-standing wedding!

The children's meetings can be funny too. One night I took a misbehaving boy from the front row and placed him between two women sitting at the back of the church. As I walked back, he shouted at me, "Hey mister, do you not know I am allergic to women?"

One night I was speaking to the children about the Good Samaritan. I asked the boys and girls, "What happened to the man on the Jericho Road?" A young lad answered immediately, "He was mugged!"

"What advice would you give to young men starting out in their pastoral ministry today?"

Here are several priorities I have tried to follow:

- Your personal relationship with the Lord is most important. Endeavour to keep fresh in your spiritual life each day.
- It is too easy for a minister to neglect his family. I have tried to follow this order of priority: I am a person before God, a partner to my wife, a parent to my children, and then a pastor to the people.
- Endeavour to maintain a warm and personal relationship with your office-bearers and congregation. The Good Shepherd loved the sheep. Let that be your pattern.
- Be diligent in your study of God's Word, faithful in prayer, and passionate in preaching and teaching the Scriptures. Only through the Word can we feed the flock and make the church grow.



Stanley Barnes

has retired from the pastorate, having ministered in Hillsborough Free Presbyterian Church, Northern Ireland.

Testimony — Melanie Thomassian



It's always a blessing to look back on how the Lord has worked in your life. My story begins in 1981, when I was born into a nominally Protestant home in Ballymoney, Northern Ireland. I was the first, and subsequently only, child of my parents.

At the age of four my parents separated, and my mother and I moved to the village of Mosside. It wasn't long after that the Jehovah's Witnesses visited and found my mother receptive to their message. This led to a Bible study, and soon afterwards we began attending the local Kingdom Hall in Ballymoney. My mother had many questions and was a very diligent student, and the Jehovah's Witnesses willingly spent hours with her, seeking to answer those questions in accordance with the teachings of the Watchtower Society. Their patience and diligence with her impressed her greatly, and as a result, we ended up as very active participants in the Ballymoney Kingdom Hall. We attended every meeting

they held and eventually spent multiple hours each week going door-to-door as part of their outreach efforts. As a young child, this was the only religious instruction I received, so I knew of nothing else, and because of their beliefs, I was always excused from any religious instruction given at the schools I attended.

At the age of fourteen I decided I would stop attending the Kingdom Hall. I became more and more interested in what my school

Since Armen professed to deny the existence of God, and I still held to Watchtower beliefs, our conflicting perspectives made for some interesting discussions.

friends were doing, living for the weekend, going to nightclubs, and everything associated with that kind of lifestyle. But things were about to take a radical turn.

While studying at the University of Ulster to become a dietitian, I worked part-time in a local restaurant, and this is where I met my future husband, Armen. Although Armen's grandparents had a long history in the Free Presbyterian Church, he had only attended Sunday school for a brief time as a child. Up to this point, we were both oblivious to how the Lord could step into a life and completely turn a person around for good. That was until the end of 2001. The Lord saved and restored a number of people connected to Armen's family, and most significant was his mother, who was converted the morning after hearing her sister share her testimony at Ballymoney FPC.

Her conversion was a shock, and following it Armen and I would talk about what we



believed. Since Armen professed to deny the existence of God, and I still held to Watchtower beliefs, our conflicting perspectives made for some interesting discussions. These were truly strange and interesting days for the girl who always thought she would go back to the Kingdom Hall one day. Thankfully, the Lord had other plans for both of us, and how much more wonderful His plans are.

When I think back to my life at the time of my conversion, I realize how merciful the Lord was to me.

Between January and May of 2002, Armen attended Ballymoney FPC on a few occasions and was graciously saved on May 13th, 2002. His first burden was for me, and he managed to get me to attend church the next week, but despite great efforts to see me converted that evening, my heart remained as stone. But God was working, and on May 26th I attended again. Rev. David Park preached that evening on Hebrews 2:3, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” The reality of divine

judgment was put before me, and under a weight of conviction, that night I took Jesus Christ at His word and He saved me. When I think back to my life at the time of my conversion, I realize how merciful the Lord was to me. I was not even looking for Him, and yet He was pleased to confront me with His truth. A year and a half later, my mother was saved, and a couple of years after that my grandmother also came to know the Lord.

It has been eighteen years since the Lord stepped into my life, and I am amazed at how He has led me. I am reminded of one of the hymns we sang on our wedding day:

I have a Shepherd, One I love so well;

How He has blessed me tongue can never tell;

On the cross He suffered, shed His blood and died,

That I might ever in His love confide.

Following Jesus, ever day by day,

Nothing can harm me when He leads the way;

Darkness or sunshine, whate'er befall,

Jesus, the Shepherd, is my All in All.

This hymn seems very apt, because the Lord has led us to places I never imagined, and yet in all the moves (Australia, Canada, and now America), I have never had cause to doubt or fear, and

this is something only the Lord can do. The moves have been big, yes. But what matters most is whether the Lord is directing. If we are in the shadow of the Shepherd, we are always safe.

When I look at my children, I see so much of the Lord's mercy. What a contrast to my early days under a false gospel, and the ignorance that made me seek pleasure in the world! I pray much for the upcoming generation of Free Presbyterians, and I hope we will see what the psalmist spoke of: “One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts” (Psalms 145:4).

If we are in the shadow of the Shepherd, we are always safe.



Melanie Thomassian
is the wife of Rev. Armen Thomassian, minister of Greenville Free Presbyterian Church, South Carolina, United States of America.

Bible Book Overview of Ruth

Introduction

The book of Ruth is a simple story in four chapters, and yet it brims with rich foreshadows of Christ and the gospel. Its commencement, however, is much darker and opens with a land under famine. First, a spiritual famine in the recent past has led to God's judgment, which itself has resulted in an actual famine. This occurrence is likely referred to in Judges 6:3–4.

The Disobedient Departure – Ruth 1:1–5

While such judgments are meant to humble God's people and cause them to prayerfully await His deliverance, it appears that one family remained in defiant unbelief – they departed the promised land for the land of Moab.

In making this choice, Elimelech was a Christian in name only. He clearly took formidable risks with the moral and spiritual welfare of his family. And yet, does our every decision recognize the kingship of Jesus (Proverbs 3:5–6)? If not, are we prepared for their future consequences?

This unbelief in God's provision was clearly shared

by Naomi, his wife, for even when her husband dies, she remains in Moab with their two sons, both of whom marry Moabitesses. All thought of the duties and delights of God's covenant seem to have been forgotten. After only ten years, both of these unequal and unfruitful yokes were broken by death.

The Humbled Homecoming – 1:6–22

Naomi, now bereft of her only blood ties in Moab, hears that God is again blessing Israel's harvests, and she decides to return home to Bethlehem. Initially, both daughters-in-law display a strong devotion towards Naomi, but Naomi can only convince Orpah to leave her and stay in Moab. The Lord, however, has done a different work in Ruth's heart, who now confesses her desire to belong to God's people, and to have their God as her God. Naomi, still very conscious of God's judgment upon her and her family, desires to be called Mara (bitter) instead of Naomi (pleasant). She has yet to see and understand God's greater intentions.

The Gracious Gleaning – Chapter 2

Ruth continues to display an exemplary love for her mother-in-law and takes up

the role of provider in their impoverished condition. She goes out to glean the nearby fields. Doubtless she chose at random, but God's providence had determined the fields belonging to Boaz. This Boaz is clearly a godly man, not just from his pious greeting of his workers, but also in his appreciation for and protection of the modest and hard-working Moabitess. She receives favour from this true Israelite and is permitted to glean behind his workers for the remaining time of barley harvest.

The Advised Approach – Chapter 3

With such favour and protection shown to Ruth, Naomi now begins to see a possible future for her daughter-in-law, and for her own family fortunes to be improved, by directing Ruth to approach Boaz on the



threshing floor. What follows is a scene that reveals both Ruth's modesty and Boaz's upright chasteness, especially when the delight of mutual affection is discovered. Naomi had correctly discerned Boaz's virtuous character.

The Righteous Redemption – 4:1–12

The following morning sees Boaz deal swiftly, honourably, and righteously. Boaz calls the kinsman nearer to Naomi than himself, who has legal first refusal to Naomi's land (Leviticus 25), to lay claim to purchase (redeem) the land, or to defer to him. The man was initially willing, until Boaz revealed that the sale was connected to Levirate law (Deuteronomy 25:5–10), which states that he must take the widow Ruth as his wife, and any firstborn child would be the legal issue of the deceased Mahlon. Now unwilling, he defers to Boaz, who becomes their kinsman-redeemer: buying them out of poverty, taking Ruth

to be his wife, and raising seed to raise up the name of the dead.



The Celebratory Conclusion – 4:13–22

The Lord blesses their union with a child, causing rejoicing and praise. Naomi, who had been bereft of husband and sons, sees bitterness divinely changed into blessing, as she is granted a grandson to whom she is so devoted, the neighbours call him hers!

A Few Types of Christ and the Gospel

Deuteronomy 23:3–4 declares that every Moabite is excommunicated from the presence of the Lord. Therefore, what wonderful grace is revealed when a Moabitess is made willing and enabled to depart heathen darkness and join God's people. This is itself a foreshadowing of the Great Commission, whereby the Gentiles are grafted into God's people (Ephesians 2:19).

Not only does faith in Christ overrule all of sin's curse, but also, by grace, Ruth becomes part of the genealogy of King David, being his great-grandmother – whereby Ruth is also a forebear to the greater Son of David, Christ Jesus, according to the flesh. Ruth the Moabitess thereby receives a highly honoured position in redemptive history.

Ruth's widowhood is also indicative of the lost condition of every elect sinner before being drawn to his or her Kinsman-Redeemer in salvation.

Also, the marriage of Boaz, the honourable and faithful kinsman-redeemer, and Ruth, the unclean Gentile, is clearly a type of Christ redeeming the church as a spotless bride to Himself.

And finally, in his redeeming work, Boaz brings riches to the poor and life to the dead. He restores all things (bereavement, widowhood, and infertility) to conclude his complete work of redemption (Revelation 21:5).

Reader, the more you study this book, the more of the Redeemer you will find!

He restores all things (bereavement, widowhood, and infertility) to conclude his complete work of redemption.



Paul Backhurst
is minister of
Calgary Free
Presbyterian Church,
Alberta, Canada.

Four Days Late



The mystery of God's sovereignty touched my heart this summer through the words of a song sung by Rev. William McCrea entitled "Four Days Late". It recounts the plight of Mary and Martha, who called to the Lord on behalf of their critically ill brother. They hoped that the Lord would heal him because they knew how much Jesus loved Lazarus. Remember how devoted they were to Christ? Remember Mary's costly ointment and Martha's selfless service on Christ's second recorded visit? They knew Him; they loved Him; they trusted Him. John 11 tells us that the Lord also loved them, and in His deliberate delay, He meant them no harm, only good. These sisters had confidence that Jesus was able to heal their dear brother if He came, but He didn't come, and Lazarus died.

It's easy to read this sad story when you know the happy ending, but think how heartbroken Mary and Martha must have been! Were they bewildered when Jesus did not come? Did their faith waver? Naturally, they didn't want to lose their dear brother, but they also

may have reasoned that the cause of Christ in Bethany would suffer without him. Lazarus' death was not what they had anticipated.

The Lord Jesus had received their message, but He waited for two days before beginning His journey to them, and by the time He arrived, Lazarus had been dead four days. During those four days, great grief surrounded Lazarus' home. Martha was the first to go out to meet Him: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:21). Mary's reaction to the Lord's arrival was unusual: "Mary sat still in the house." But Martha believed the Lord had the power to still save her brother. "Even now," she said to Him. The Lord felt their pain, because He knew they couldn't see His plan, and when He saw their tears, Jesus wept. Unknown to Mary and Martha, Jesus

Unknown to Mary and Martha, Jesus had an important purpose in their brother's death ...

had an important purpose in their brother's death: "for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (v. 4). Lazarus had to die so that the Lord would use his death to bring great glory to the Father, great joy to the mourners, and great salvation to many of the Jews by his resurrection.

But His way is God's way,
not yours or mine

And isn't it great, when
He's four days late

He's still on time.

The Bible teaches us that God's ways are not our ways: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). Here the Lord gives us an immeasurable distance, so that we can appreciate that there is a vast difference between His ways and ours. For this reason, there are many things we cannot see or know, but instead of questioning, we must deliberately, submissively, and unconditionally rest

secure in the knowledge that our sovereign God does all things well.

“When you go through a trial, the sovereignty of God is the pillow upon which you lay your head” (C. H. Spurgeon). None of us can feel the soothing comfort of that pillow until we fully surrender to the reality that God is in complete control of our life and circumstances; nothing happens without His knowledge; He only means to do us good and not harm; He cannot be unkind or ungracious in His dealings with His people. Then we will be able to accept by faith what we cannot understand by sight in the midst of life’s fiercest trials.

More often than not, when I write an LTBS article, the Lord puts me through some personal challenges that teach me the lesson first. This issue is no exception. Some weeks ago the Lord directed my thoughts to this topic before I heard the devastating news of Dr Alan Cairns’s sickness. Like so many of you, I regarded Dr Cairns as a father, a mentor, an encourager, a friend whom I have known and loved since my childhood – a champion of the faith, a man of God to whom I am deeply indebted. (It was he who encouraged me to write for LTBS eleven years ago.) Like many of you, I cried to

the Lord to spare His servant with the words of Mary and Martha ringing in my heart: “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick” (John 11:3). Dr. Cairns’s life and ministry touched so many of us, both young and old. Across the world, thousands of us deeply mourn his death; God has taken His servant home in His time, not ours, according to His perfect plan.

How comforting to know that the Lord is always in complete control, even when we don’t understand.

Mary and Martha learned that even when the Lord was four days late, He was still on time – His time. What a blessing to know that we can rest upon the security of God’s sovereignty when we are in distress, danger, despair, or decision. We can always trust the sovereign plan of our sovereign God.

Upon God’s will I lay me down,

As child upon its mother’s breast;

No silken couch, nor softest bed,

Could ever give me such deep rest.

One of Dr. Cairns’s legacies to us was his invaluable resource, the *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, which was compiled to help Christians understand the doctrines of the Word of God better. How fitting that we conclude with what he wrote for us on the sovereignty of God.

There is no defect in God’s planning, so it needs no alteration. No creature’s action takes place outside of His control and purpose, so it cannot be upset by unforeseen circumstances. God Himself does not change, but remains faithful. Thus there is no possibility of any alteration in His eternal purpose, a fact that is set forth in the Word for our comfort ...

Every Christian celebrates the same truth each time he prays as the Lord Jesus taught His people to pray, “Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory” (Matt. 6:13), and each time he draws sweet consolation from the assurance of Rom. 8:28: “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” How can we know any such thing but by knowing that our God is sovereign and is in control?

In Loving Memory of Dr Alan Cairns



Jill Saunders

is the wife of Dr Larry Saunders, minister of Toronto Free Presbyterian Church, Toronto, Canada, and the Principal of Whitefield Christian Academy.

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