

# faith matters 9

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## FACING DEATH

**Stephen Baker, Liverpool**

From time to time I visit people who are sick. Sometimes I call at their homes, but often I pop into the hospital to see them. Hospitals can be very sad places. The circumstances and struggles of life and the prospect of facing death are often confronted head-on in a hospital.

Nurses, doctors, porters and cleaners are often amazing people. Their skills and abilities far exceed the basic requirement to clean, transport and provide medical care. Usually, it is these unrecognized people who have a kind word to say and the ability to encourage, amuse and lift a person's spirit. They are quite an amazing group of people.



*'What do you say to someone who is dying?'*

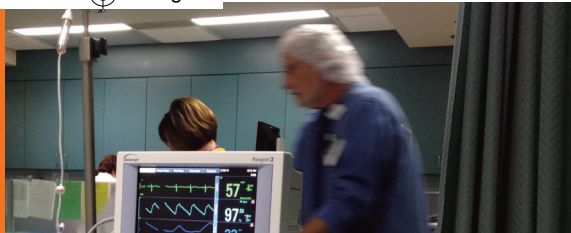
### A Hopeless Situation

But, here's my question. What do you say to someone who is dying? When all prospect of recovery has gone, and the raw and painful news that life is drawing to an end comes, what can you say? Platitudes and empty words are of no value then!

1 Facing death  
3 God and tragedy

5 The Iron Cross  
8 Smells good

10 Has science buried God?



The other day I stood in a hospital lift. Various people got out at each floor and, eventually, the only people left were another lady and me. She glanced at the Bible in my hand, and as she left the lift she said, with a sigh, 'it's a hopeless situation'. I don't really know what she meant. As the lift door closed before I could ask her, I didn't find out. But I do know this, that for many life ends in a hopeless situation.

### *'A Hopeless Situation'*

The Lord Jesus was a close friend of a family who lived in a small hamlet called Bethany. It is located on the eastern slope of Mount Olivet, about two miles south-east of Jerusalem, on the road to Jericho. Lazarus' sisters were most upset when he took ill and even more upset when Jesus did not turn up. They had even sent him a message to let Him know that Lazarus was sick. Jesus was missing when they needed him most. Maybe you feel like that at times! God doesn't seem to turn up when you need him most. It is hard to understand why life turns out the way it does. However, one thing we can learn from this story is that God cares, even when we assume He doesn't.

Jesus arrived four days after the funeral. Martha and Mary (the sisters) were quite indignant. If He had come in time Lazarus would not have died, for Jesus was renowned for making sick people well.

### **Hopeless to Hope**

Sometimes God allows us to go through experiences to teach us lessons that we could never learn in the easier seasons of life. God can be trusted in life, and when facing sickness and death. You will understand what I mean about trusting God if

you have ever had an experience like I had. Many years ago, I came to understand that I had wronged God (sinned) and had no hope in this life or the next. The best bit was that I also learned that Christ had died for my sins. God loved me so much that He had given His

Son, Jesus, to pay for my wrong, to forgive me and give me hope.



Mary and Martha's devastation and sorrow turned to joy when they realized that there is life after death and hope for the future for those who believe in Jesus. He is, as He stated, 'the resurrection and the life' – read the whole story for yourself in the New Testament in John chapter 11.

If you are facing illness and trauma in life, please be assured of this: God loves you and cares for you more than you can imagine.



**Ian Jackson, Eastbourne**

Last year was the centenary of the end of hostilities in World War I, the so-called 'war to end all wars'. It is reckoned that the total number of military and civilian casualties was about 40 million, with up to 19 million fatalities.

However, these huge figures were made to look small by the events of World War II. It is reckoned that during those six dreadful years 70-85 million people died, a figure representing something like 3% of the world's population in 1940.

In addition to these devastating figures, it is further reckoned that up to 100 million people died under communist oppression between 1917 and 2017. Some estimates are far higher.

People are very quick to say that all this tragedy points to there being no God, though, strangely, those who say this would absolutely hate it if

God were to intervene in their own lives to stop every wrong thing they did. Also, while so many rail at the evil that they see all around them, so few actually take steps to deal with the wickedness that is in their own hearts.

And this is where the real problem lies. There is nothing that happens in the world at large that does not find its origin in our hearts. Whilst many, remarkably, believe in the inherent goodness of human beings, the Bible says that, 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked', Jeremiah 17.9. Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ said, 'From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man', Mark 7. 21-23.

Man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart. If your appearance truly reflected what you really are, how would you look? Expensive clothing and accessories, state-of-the-art hairdressing and the skilful application of cosmetics can cover a whole lot of things we might not want others to see and know about; but our real problem has nothing to do with what we look like. We all have a serious heart problem.

their sins and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul later wrote them a letter in which, having listed many such sins, he said, 'And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God', see 1 Corinthians 6. 9-11.

In the gospel of Christ there is soul-saving and life-changing power. Do you recognize yourself to be a slave



One of the hardest things is to admit this. The Bible relates how King David committed adultery with the wife of one of his greatest generals. He tried to keep it secret to such an extent that he was prepared to arrange for that man's death on the battlefield. One day, however, convicted of his sin, he cried, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God', Psalm 51. 10. Much later, towards the end of the Bible, the Apostle John says, 'The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin', 1 John 1. 7.

In fact, the Bible has a whole lot to say about cleansing from sin and its defilement. One day the Apostle Paul went to preach Christ in the city of Corinth. It was renowned for its sexually immoral lifestyle, which is one of the kinds of behaviour which bars entry into the kingdom of God. Many of the Corinthians repented of

of sin? In Christ there is deliverance. Do you know the guilt of sin? In Christ there is true freedom. Do you despair at the defilement of sin in your life? In Christ there is purification and cleansing, which can be found nowhere else. And we stand in desperate need of that cleansing, for nothing that defiles will ever enter into the presence of the holy God of heaven.

A famous hymn puts it like this.

*He breaks the power of cancelled sin,  
He sets the prisoner free;  
His blood can make the foulest clean,  
His blood avails for me.*

Praise God, there is new life in Christ, 'Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new', 2 Corinthians 5. 17.

# the IRON CROSS

**Stuart Scammell**, Cardiff

As a young boy, I was always fascinated by a few artefacts from World War II that were dotted around my grandparents' house. These included large brass shells that had been polished and transformed into umbrella stands, some wooden boxes, an old army belt and an actual incendiary bomb that had been made safe.

I was always fascinated by history and would ask my grandfather to tell me stories from his experiences during the war. Even as a young boy I recognized that he had told me stories reluctantly and that these stories had been somewhat sanitized for my hearing.

My grandfather believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour. As a Christian, at the outbreak of World War II, he didn't want to fight and, possibly, take the lives of enemy soldiers and, in effect, usher them into eternity, which they may not have been prepared for. He believed, as the Bible teaches, that there





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are two eternal destinations: heaven for those that accept God's forgiveness; and hell for those who refuse the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.

To avoid being put into this position, he decided to join up early so that he would have a choice where he served. He chose to join the Royal Army Medical Corps, so that he wouldn't have to carry arms.

One of the first jobs he was given to

dropped around them.

My grandfather served as part of the Royal Army Medical Corps in many areas, such as North Africa and Italy, he received many medals for bravery. He did this not by carrying guns, but stretchers, pulling many soldiers from the battlefield.

His faith in Jesus Christ had taught him to show love to those who had not shown love to him. In fact, he



'the Son of God,  
loved me and  
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do was just outside Bristol on the Downs. As the bombers flew over from Germany to bomb Bristol, they would send the first wave to drop incendiary devices to light the way, pointing out the targets to the second wave of bombers. He, along with a few others, were asked to light beacons on the Downs to deflect the bombers away from the city, thus saving lives. Obviously, he and his comrades were in great danger. They had to dive into a bunker pulling sandbags over the door while bombs

knew that our sin had made us enemies of God. God was not our enemy, we were His!

How did God react to our hostility? Did He treat us as an enemy? No, not at all, the Bible says that while we were still sinners, doing the very thing that God hates . . . Christ died for us.

Another Christian relative of mine found himself guarding a German war hero, this man had been awarded an



Iron Cross by his country for bravery. This was the highest military accolade that could be awarded to German soldiers in recognition of their heroic service. As a result, the Iron Cross was this man's most treasured possession.

Some of the other guards treated him badly, but my relative showed him kindness. As a result, he reacted with gratitude and cut a part of the ribbon from his Iron Cross and gave it to him.

God's love is immense! Jesus Christ died, taking the punishment that we deserved.

He expects us to react with gratitude, trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and allowing Him to lead in our lives.

In the box among my grandfather's medals is the piece of ribbon that was given, it obviously had great significance to those involved. When we read the Bible and think of how much God has loved us, how

do we react? Do we reject Him, or do we worship Him and trust in Him for what Jesus Christ has done on the cross for us?

The German soldier gave up something very precious to him. It was a short piece of the medal ribbon. I wonder just how he felt as he cut the ribbon that, no doubt, he had taken care to preserve, even in difficult circumstances. He gave the part of his treasured possession to one that he would have once considered an enemy.

The Lord Jesus Christ didn't show to us a gesture or give us a small part of something, albeit very precious. He gave everything for us. Galatians chapter 2 verse 20 tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, loved me and gave Himself for me.

He gave Himself for you too; He died for your sins. Will you confess to God that you are a sinner and, believing, take Jesus Christ as Saviour?

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# SMELLS GOOD!

A newly mown lawn. Freshly baked bread. The aroma when I open a new packet of coffee. The scent that greets me if I walk through the front door when a roast dinner is cooking in the oven. To misquote Mary Poppins, 'these are a few of my favourite smells'. They evoke childhood memories and anticipate joyful experiences for me. Which smells have similar effects for you?

**Jeremy Singer**, Bridge of Weir

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joyful experiences for me. Which smells have similar effects for you?

Perfumes are carefully crafted scents, many of them highly expensive and sought after. Did you know the global perfume industry is estimated to be worth around £50 billion per year? Perfume was equally valuable in Bible times. When a woman anointed the feet of the Lord Jesus



with perfume, the disciples calculated its cost at 'more than three hundred pence', Mark 14. 5, which would have been a typical annual salary. The woman who gave her perfume to the Lord Jesus made a remarkable sacrifice and He recognized it.

This incident took place only a few days before the crucifixion, the first Easter. As the Lord Jesus walked the road to Calvary, His feet would have

terms of both His sinless humanity, 1 John 3. 5, and His complete obedience to the Father, Phil. 2. 8.

On the other hand, our lives only bring displeasure to God, despite our best efforts. The Bible likens us to vexing smoke – 'These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day', Isa. 65. 5. Consider how smoke gets into everything and how it irritates our airways; this is the effect



**'They  
pierced my  
hands and  
my feet',  
Ps. 22. 16,**

retained that sweet perfume fragrance. As He was nailed to the cross – 'They pierced my hands and my feet', Ps. 22. 16, there may have been a lingering scent, a reminder of one woman's devotion to her Lord which was a stark contrast to the general rejection of Jesus.

Despite the depravity of the crucifixion, the Lord's death was a 'sweetsmelling savour' to God, Eph. 5. 2. His sacrificial death brought pleasure to God, like a beautiful incense aroma. This fragrance derived from His absolute perfection, in

we have on God! The prophet Jonah was sent to the ancient mega-city of Nineveh because God told him, 'their wickedness is come up before me', Jonah 1. 2. When we wrinkle up our noses at bad odours, think about how God feels about our sinfulness.

The only way to become acceptable to God, to avoid divine judgement and receive His blessing, is for us to accept the Lord Jesus Christ personally, 'who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree', 1 Pet. 2. 24.


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# HAS SCIENCE BURIED GOD?

**Paul McCauley**, Belfast

Some ideas become so embedded in a culture that they are assumed without challenge. One of those notions is that science has buried God.

But is it true? Let's look at three scientific facts which I hope will show that science points towards, not away from, God.

## **We live in a fathomable universe**

What kind of universe makes science possible? We need:

### **i. A rational creation**

If the universe tumbled into existence without a creator/designer, why would anyone suppose it to operate according to discoverable and consistent laws? Does not the existence of laws naturally point to a lawgiver?

### **ii. Rational creatures**

For science to be possible there needs to be a creature capable of rational thought. If atheism were true, everything in the universe is purely

physical, reacting according to physical law, which would mean that there is no such thing as rationality. Every thought of the mind would be only the by-product of chemical processes over which we have no control. As the Christian apologist, FRANK TUREK, says, 'it's not merely that science supports theism but theism supports science. In other words, theism makes doing science possible'.<sup>[1]</sup>

## **We live in a finite universe**

Last century a number of independent scientific discoveries proved that the universe had a beginning a finite time ago.

Science is the search for causes to explain effects. What could be the cause of the universe? People will often reply, 'The Big Bang'. But that isn't an explanation – it's the thing that needs to be explained. The big bang is just a name which some scientists use to describe the event of the universe coming into existence. – it's not the cause; it's simply the effect.

Whatever caused the universe must be

non-physical, eternal and immensely powerful. In a word, God.

### **We live in a fine-tuned universe**

This can be seen in physics and biology.

#### **Physics**

Physicists have found that the existence of the universe is balanced on a very thin tightrope. There are dozens of physical constants and quantities which, had they been the slightest bit different, would have ruled out stars, planets and chemistry.[2]

It's like a machine with a control panel. The panel has dozens of dials, each with trillions of possible settings. For the machinery to work, each dial has to be set to the right value. If one of the dials is the slightest bit off then the machine can't work. If you arrived at the factory and found the machine working, would you conclude that someone had come in and randomly spun all the dials? Of course not. But this is what atheists are forced to conclude about the universe – by sheer fluke it came into existence with the settings exactly right. To give you an idea of how finely tuned the universe is, consider that the dial

on our factory machine for the cosmological constant has 1010(120) settings – that's a 1 with a trillion trillion trillion trillion trillion zeros after it![3]

That's just one of the dials that have to be set just right. There are loads of others.

#### **Biology**

Back in Darwin's day it was supposed that a single cell was a simple thing, but research has revealed its complexity. The cell is like a motor car factory with loads of mini assembly lines and all the different parts performing different functions. A typical cell contains billions of units of DNA comprising the chromosomes. DNA can only be described in terms of language or code, and has been likened to a computer program; indeed, BILL GATES said 'DNA is far, far more advanced than any software Microsoft had created'.[4] Every single one of the trillions of cells in the human body contains a database larger than the Encyclopaedia Britannica. But where does this information come from? Who is the programmer? Who wrote the language and devised the code? Information can only come from

intelligence. Thus, biology, as well as physics, points to an intelligent designer.

#### **Conclusion**

The Bible says that the existence and power of God are 'clearly seen . . . by the things that are made', Romans 1. 20. This has only become more obvious as science has advanced. Science has not buried God; it has buried atheism. You can reject the existence of a creator if you want, but in light of a fathomable, finite, fine-tuned universe, you can't claim that science is on your side.

[1] FRANK TUREK, *Stealing from God, Why atheists need God to make their case*, NavPress, 2014, pg. 145.

[2] The fine-tuned constants include the force of gravity, the electromagnetic force, and the strong and weak nuclear forces. The fine-tuned quantities include the entropy level of the universe and the ratio of protons to electrons.

[3] <https://beliefmap.org/god-exists/universe-fine-tuned/cosmological-constant/>

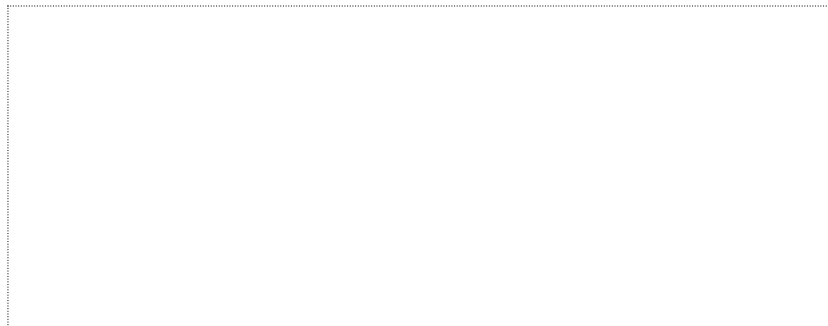
[4] BILL GATES, *The Road Ahead*, cited in LEE STROBEL, *The Case for a Creator, A Journalist Investigates Scientific Evidence That Points toward God*, Zondervan, 2004, pg. 238.

## QUICK QUOTE

**"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible  
than to be alive without breathing."  
Martin Luther**

*What think ye of Christ?*

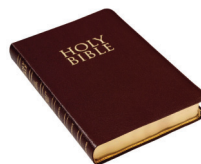
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