



*The Way, Truth, and Life Series*  
December 2, 2018

# Gems of Truth

## Mr. Train Man and Martha

Mary Chandler



Wendell hunched over his workbench, repairing a section of his outdoor train track. Outside, the wind howled.

"You in there?" a voice called. "It's Nick. Brought you some coffee and a pastrami on rye."

"Not again," Wendell thought. "Since cancer took Afton six weeks ago, Nick hasn't given me a moment's peace."

"Yeah, I'm here. C'mon in."

The shop door slammed shut. Nick handed Wendell the food, pulled off his jacket and red wool cap, and sat down. "Well?" Nick asked.

"Well, what?"

"Does that track mean you're going to set up your annual Christmas train ride to the stable?"

"Like I said, Nick, I don't know if I'm up to it, what with Afton gone and all." He sipped his coffee. "It was her idea, you know. Her way of giving to the neighborhood kids — especially to Martha."

"You mean Mrs. O'Malley's girl? The twenty-something adult with the mind of a six-year-old?"

"Exactly. Afton painted flowered barrettes for Martha's hair, and last year she made her a Christmas ornament. Anything to make her feel special." Wendell sighed. "To tell the truth, Nick, seeing Martha and Mrs. O'Malley depresses me."

"Why's that? They seem happy enough."

Wendell shrugged. How could he explain shattered dreams and a broken heart to someone who couldn't possibly understand? Nick still had his Nancy and a passel of super-bright kids.

"Well, if you decide to go through with the train ride, call and we'll be over."

"Thanks, Nick. And thanks for the food."

That night Wendell walked through the

lonely house. Memories of Afton lingered everywhere. In the kitchen, arranging her crisscross pie crust over cinnamon-apple pie, Wendell's favorite. In the living room, reading her Bible beside the blazing fire. In the bedroom, thanking God for His blessings, before snuggling close.

"Why did you leave me?" Wendell asked aloud. "Why?" He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes. A deep heaviness settled over him. He sank into his recliner and turned on the radio to drown out the quiet.

The ringing phone startled him.

"Mrs. O'Malley here. Just wondering about your Christmas plans, you know, before I make promises to Martha."

Wendell stared at the empty chair beside the fireplace. No question what Afton would do, if she were still here.

"Sure," he heard himself say. "Tell Martha that the train ride and the stable are on."

After he hung up, Wendell wondered what he'd gotten himself into. The train cars needed touch-up paint. Parts of the extensive track needed to be repaired and re-assembled. The engine would have to be oiled and tuned. The tunnel leading to the barn needed attention. Gifts had to be made and wrapped. And he'd have to finish the face of Mary for the new life-sized nativity scene he'd been making for Afton. That face would be his biggest challenge. He'd tried repeatedly, but he couldn't get it right.

Wendell checked his calendar, wondering how one day could have melted into the next all these weeks without him noticing. "Twelve days until Christmas Eve," he said. "Only twelve days. Better call Nick."

Early Saturday morning, Wendell hurried to his shop to mix the paints. Adding bright red for accents, he touched up the black train engine, while Nick and the four Nelson kids painted the blue, yellow, green, and orange cars. Laughter filled the shop. Wendell scurried from one car to the next, checking the work and answering a million questions. He thought about Jeremy and Casey, his young grandsons in Alaska, and wished they could be here to help.

"Whew! I never knew how much work you went to for your Christmas ride, Wendell," Nick said, as he straightened a section of track and hooked it to another section. "How long you been doin' this, anyway?"

"Nineteen years, come December 24 — since Martha turned eight."

Every morning, Nick and his kids helped Wendell, in-

side his shop and fixing the tracks. Mid-afternoon, they disappeared with Nancy.

"What's left? And how can we help?" Nick asked on December 23. "Nancy and her Sunday school class are finishing the gifts, along with my Boy Scout troop." He smiled. "Amazing what those kids can create! Beaded picture frames, keepsake boxes, and the like for the girls; tooled belts, carved planes, trucks, cars, and wooden whistles for the boys."

"Great!" Wendell wiped his hands on his shop apron. "Tomorrow we need to shore up the tunnel leading to the barn, string the lights, and hang the star. I'll set up the nativity scene inside the barn tonight."

"We'll be back," Nick promised, gathering up the kids to work on their gift projects.

From the back of his shop, Wendell removed his new carvings — Mary, Joseph, the infant Jesus, two shepherds, the three wise men carrying their gifts, four lambs, and a grazing cow. One by one, he carried them into the barn and placed them on the straw — except for Mary. For her, he needed a face — a young, innocent face, filled with love and sacrifice.

And then he remembered Afton's print of Michelangelo's *pieta* — the mother holding the crucified Christ in her arms, sculpted with her face frozen in time, in memory of Michelangelo's own mother who died when he was only six. Strangely, that mother's face reminded Wendell of someone else.

Wendell gathered his brushes and paints and, with the print beside him, went to work. It seemed as though someone was guiding his hand. As he painted, he imagined Afton looking down and smiling.

By five o'clock on Christmas Eve, the train cars bustled with happy children. When the ride finished, the kids were met by their parents inside the barn by the stable, where they awaited the annual Christmas story and a homemade gift in memory of the gifts brought to the Christ Child.

Three train trips later, Mrs. O'Malley and Martha still hadn't arrived. Wendell worried that something terrible had happened. In past years, the O'Malleys had always come early and lined up first.

And then he saw them — a loving mother and her daughter-child, walking hand-in-hand toward the train.

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# Gems of Truth

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# By-Lanes



## Still Digging

In a country district some years ago the way to church was often blocked by heavy snowstorms, so that even the minister could only with difficulty get to it, and other people often not at all. One small boy became tired of it; and after a particularly heavy fall of snow, he was observed by a passerby trying desperately to make a hole in a drift which in some places was very nearly as tall as he was.

“What are you up to, boy?” called the man genially.

“Tomorrow is Sunday,” puffed the boy, going on with his digging.

“Guess ’tis!” said the man. “But what’s that got to do with your digging?”

“I’m going to make a path so the folks can get to church and Sunday school.”

“Ho, ho!” laughed the man, the relative size of the boy

and the snowbank impressing him as a great joke. “It’s a good idea, sure enough, but you’ll have to wait to grow a little. Wait till you are a man, and maybe you could tackle it.”

“Maybe I’ll be dead then,” said the boy, still digging. “A live boy is better than a dead man, I guess, if he ain’t so big.”

Something hit home in that speech, though the boy did not mean it. The man’s face became red for a minute, and then he went off whistling. Before long he came with a big shovel of his own, and a rough woodsled with two farm horses hitched to it. The live boy, and the man who had concluded that he would not be a dead man, made a path that was easy for the next day’s Sunday goers.

— *Selected*



### Mr. Train Man and Martha

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“I see the train! I see the train!” Martha shouted, breaking loose and running toward him. “Is the train going to the Baby Jesus, Mr. Train Man?” she asked.

“It is, and it’s been waiting for you. Hop in, and let’s go!”

Inside the barn, Martha stared at the nativity scene. “Me,” she said, pointing to Mary’s face and then to herself. Wendell looked at Mrs. O’Malley and nodded. Her eyes brimmed with tears. His heart was full.

Martha sat quietly with the other children, while Wendell read the story of the birth of Jesus from his well-worn

Bible. While the kids were opening their gifts, Wendell leaned over. “Martha,” he whispered, “I have something special just for you.”

She unwrapped the gift — the print of Michelangelo’s *pieta* in a new custom-made frame, gilded with gold.

“Look, Mama!” she said. “It’s Martha-Mary holding Jesus, before He went to live in heaven.” She clutched her treasure close to her heart. “I love my Jesus,” Martha said. “Thank you, Mr. Train Man.” She paused. “Mama said Mrs. Train Lady lives in heaven, too, with Jesus.”

Wendell nodded. “She does.”

Martha smiled — the sweet, innocent smile of a child — and Wendell felt the hole in his heart growing smaller.

# A Modern Mephibosheth

Esther L. Vogt

A True Account

It was December 10, 1949. The hospital reeked of ether, for the long, difficult delivery was finally over.

It had been so much different when their older child was born to the Curt Vogts nearly four years earlier. Now they had a son as well as a daughter.

"We'll call him Ranney Lee," the father said.

Later, Dr. Brown explained what happened. "It was too late for a C-section. I was forced to perform an inversion and extraction. He suffered brain damage, but I'm not sure how much. It's a miracle he's alive!"

The baby was alive, and that's all that mattered, the parents decided.

When the doctor came into the mother's room the next morning, he looked worried. "Your baby is in much pain," he said. "He is hemorrhaging and has a high fever. Both arms were injured in the delivery. He doesn't look well at all."

The mother's face fell. "Is he going to die?"

"I've done all I can," replied the doctor. "I can't give you any hope."

The parents looked at each other, their faces stricken. They had prayed for this child. Would the Lord take him?

As Christmas carols drifted through the quiet halls, the mother turned away. She felt like jerking the colored lights from the Christmas tree that blinked at one end of the corridor. Christmas was supposed to be a happy season, not a time of despair and hopelessness.

Each time a nurse came in, she expected to hear, "Your baby is dead." But she didn't.

Even four-year-old Shirley grasped the seriousness of the situation. She told her Sunday school teacher, "I have a baby brother, but I think he's going to live with Jesus."

One morning Dr. Brown's steps were bouncy when he came into Mrs. Vogt's room. "I can't understand it," he said. "Your baby is suddenly much better. His fever is gone; the hemorrhaging has stopped. It's nothing I did; it's God's grace!"

Two weeks after Christmas, Ranney was home. The bandages were removed, and the tiny, injured arms were straight. The family learned that his physical movements might be hampered as a result of the brain damage. Fortunately, his mental capacity wasn't affected. The doctor said it was cerebral palsy.



A sister, Naomi, joined the family thirteen months later. As time wore on, the two sisters spent many hours helping their handicapped brother. The whole family learned much about cerebral palsy in the years that followed, for everything Ranney did required double effort. Countless exercises and trials and errors later, he learned to dress and feed himself. At ten he walked by himself, but with little grace.

In spite of his handicap, he was accepted into public school. His mother helped him back and forth to school on his three-wheeled bike and up the steps to his classroom. He rated among the top students with an above-average IQ.

He had a keen sense of music and whiled away many hours at the piano, hacking out tunes and harmonizing them with cramped fingers. Once when Naomi was playing the piano and ignoring the dissonances, he yelled from the next room, "Sharp it! Sharp it!"

When Ranney was eight, he asked Jesus to come into his life. Once when he shared his faith with Dick, a mildly retarded fellow, Dick asked, "May I pray and ask Jesus into my life like He's in yours?"

When Ranney was ready for high school, the principal had second thoughts. "I know Ranney has done well in the lower grades, where he was mostly confined to one classroom. But in high school the students must move from room to room, from upstairs to down. I'm afraid he won't be able to cope with the pell-mell rush between classes!"

A special school was financially out of the question. Mother and son begged for a chance. Finally the principal consented to a six-week trial period. For several weeks that summer, Ranney and his mom could be seen at the school, where he practiced climbing stairs.

At the end of the six-week probation, she approached the principal. "Does Ranney stay or not?" she asked, her heart beating with hope.

"Of course he stays!" the principal almost shouted. "He's managed far beyond our expectations."

Ranney maintained his high grade average all through high school and graduated with honors. He received special recognition for having achieved his high school education under extremely difficult physical problems.

In the fall of 1968 he entered Emporia (Kansas) State University, sixty miles away, enrolling in the school of business. This college was one of the first in the nation to build ramps and provide elevators for the handicapped. New dorms were built with the handicapped in mind.

With financial aid from the Kansas rehabilitation department, Ranney was educated to become independent, again maintaining his honor roll status all through college and being graduated with high honors in 1973. He received the business school's annual honors award that year.

Now he was ready for a job — but not selling greeting cards and magazine subscriptions door to door as he'd done faithfully each summer to earn money. When he was offered a job as bookkeeper for the university's Student Union bookstore, he knew he was on his own. Later he took a position as statistician for the college dietary services.

Presently, Ranney lives in an apartment some eight blocks from his job and drives a little golf-cart-type, battery-powered vehicle. He enjoys traveling and has vacationed by plane or bus in Oregon, California, Arizona, Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois to visit family and friends.

His droll sense of humor tempers his frustrations when he loses his balance and flops to the floor. The extrovert in him triggers his amusement at the frequent mishaps. Ranney credits much of his accomplishments to his family. "Without their hard-hitting encouragement and faith in me, I couldn't have done it," he asserts.

It took driving thousands of miles, plus spending countless dollars on doctors, treatment, and therapy, but all the hard work paid off. When he finally held up his head without lolling to one side and straightened his right knee more, when he was able to scratch numbers and letters on paper, and when he developed a measure of muscular

coordination, real determination was born. There was also the "standing table" his dad built, the parallel bars and walkers, the special spoon, special cup, and dish he was encouraged to use — all practical aids for the cerebral palsied. (He still drinks with a straw.) Each time he accomplished something new, he was applauded.

He still maintains his love for music and possesses an impressive library of classical music. Bible study and devotional life are paramount.

He is a good listener and makes friends easily, sharing with others what Christ means to him. Many persons have testified how his gumption has encouraged them. His favorite scripture is 2 Corinthians 4:17: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

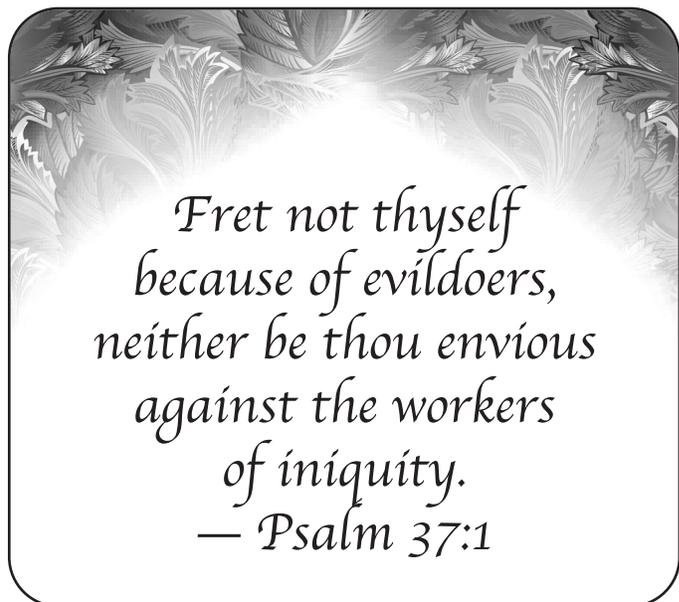
When Ranney was ten, he received a special visit. Two Sunday school teachers from another church, in preparing the lesson on Mephibosheth (the lame prince in 2 Samuel 9 to whom King David was kind), decided that their "little Davids" needed to meet and appreciate a "lame Mephibosheth." They arranged for a visit. They had prepared the youngsters, who introduced themselves politely when they arrived.

After several quiet games and some scenes dramatized from the Bible, they presented him with a gift. The refreshments of ice cream bars and cookies proved to be exactly the kind of dessert Ranney could handle himself. After the last straggler left, waving a sticky good-bye, Ranney turned to his mother with a happy sigh.

"I think I know just how Mephibosheth must have felt when David was kind to him — sort of bubbly and full of love and close to God!"

His many friends will attest that they feel much like David must have felt when they visit Ranney today!

— *Sunday School Times and Gospel Herald*



## Beside Still Waters



### A Christmas Prayer

*Oh, God our Help in ages past,  
Our Hope in years to be,  
Look down upon this present  
And see our need of Thee —  
For in this age of unrest,  
With danger all around,  
We need Thy hand to lead us  
To higher, safer ground —  
We need Thy help and counsel  
To make us more aware  
That our safety and security  
Lie solely in Thy care —  
And so we pray this Christmas  
To feel Thy presence near,  
And for Thy all-wise guidance  
Throughout the coming year —  
First, give us understanding  
Enough to make us kind,  
So we may judge all people  
With our heart and not our mind,  
Then give us strength and courage  
To be honorable and true  
And place our trust implicitly  
In “unseen things” and “you” —  
And help us when we falter,  
And renew our faith each day,  
And forgive our human errors,  
And hear us when we pray,  
And keep us gently humble  
In the greatness of Thy love  
So someday we are fit to dwell  
With Thee in peace above.*

— Helen Steiner Rice

## You Came to Us Christmas on the Battlefield

Richard Hayward



The night was cold and wet. The chilly, damp air seemed to cut right through me. My wet hands clutched an M-1 rifle as I strained to see anything that moved.

It was World War II. Our company had been ordered to take “Hill E” on the island of Leyte in the Philippines. We had failed. Darkness came before we could dig in and get organized. We lay down in a protective circle, facing out.

In two weeks’ time the thirty-nine men in our platoon had dwindled to thirteen, and there were only three men left in my squad.

I began to feel the pain of being ten thousand miles from home and all alone in the world. No one seemed to care. I’d seen a happy man, blood streaming from a mangled hand, run down the safe side of a hill and jump and yell for joy. “I’m going home,” he said. “The war’s over for me! You poor devils are stuck in this ‘living hell’ forever!”

Why wasn’t I hit so that I could go home? I felt my body all over, but there were no wounds. Would I get it tomorrow? The next day? When? Being killed or wounded seemed inevitable. I kept wondering how bad it would be.

Then I began feeling hopeless and afraid. Fear turned into terror. My throat went dry, and my heart pounded faster. I was shaking and began to cry. One word echoed in my mind: “God.”

I got on my knees. I sobbed, “O God, I can’t take it any more! I’m at the end of my rope! You take over. I’m your man. Living or dying or wounded, I’m your man. Come into my heart and take over my life. Amen.”

All of a sudden, a peace came over me. I was completely relaxed. I felt as if I were in God’s hands. In my mind I heard God say, “It’s going to be all right.” I lay down and dropped into a deep sleep.

The sun was shining brightly in my eyes when I woke

up the next morning. The other guys were getting something to eat. I felt good. It was great to be alive!

I took my New Testament with the Psalms, opened it to Psalm 91, and began to read: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. . . . Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee" (vs. 1-7).

I wasn't afraid any more. God was with me. In the days following, I faced situations in which I should have been killed or wounded, but wasn't. Once a sniper's bullet missed me and went into a tree where I had been standing seconds before. Another time a bullet tore the heel off my shoe as I dove for cover. One time an artillery shell didn't go off when it crashed into the ground twenty feet away from me; and at another, a land mine failed to explode.

Then in December 1944 an incident brought home to me what happened when I made that prayer.

The day before Christmas our company was ordered to move out to a hill five miles away where another American company was cut off, surrounded by enemy soldiers, and running out of supplies except for food dropped from aircraft.

We moved out early in the morning in single file. The 100 men of our company came down the hill, crossed an open meadow, and started up a wooded ridge in full view of the enemy. Outnumbered now, the enemy seemed to vanish as we made our way toward the other American company.

Our platoon was the first in the line of march, with our squad as the eyes and ears for the whole outfit. I was first scout. We hiked up the ridge through the woods. After several hours, we came to a clearing about fifty yards across.

I remember as if it were yesterday seeing that rugged soldier from the other American company — with shaggy beard and dirty fatigues — run down the hill toward us. He grabbed me and hugged me like a small boy grabs a lost puppy. Then he yelled, "My hat's off to you guys of the 32nd Division! You came to us when we couldn't come to you!"

We had broken through their ring of isolation and given them new hope, new strength, new courage, and a new lease on life.

That Christmas Eve the Christmas trees, decorations, attractive presents, and Christmas carols were a part of "Never-Never Land." Instead of a present in my hand, I found a rifle. The carols that year were the frequent booming of artillery shells. Instead of sitting in a comfortable warm house in front of a Christmas tree, I shivered in a

foxhole and looked out on the jagged remains of a huge old tree.

Yet it was during such an experience that I found the real meaning of the word Savior: "You came to us when we couldn't come to you."

God in Jesus Christ was my Savior and had cut through my feelings of fear, terror, hopelessness, loneliness, and depression to give me peace, love, joy, and happiness.

That's what Christmas is all about. Jesus, our Savior, is born anew in our lives. Christ came to us when we couldn't come to Him.

— *Vital Christianity*



## *Psalms for December*

**Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart (37:4).**

**Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name (100:4).**

**Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer (17:4).**

**Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart (26:2).**

**My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up (5:3).**

**Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful (1:1).**

**Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy (99:9).**

**Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old (25:6).**



# Science and the Bible

## Circles Under the Sun

### The Book of Ecclesiastes

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:1, 2). Thus opens one of the most variously interpreted books in the Bible, the Book of Ecclesiastes, which means “the Preacher.” It is assumed the son of David was Solomon, though he never calls himself by that name in the book.

The writing is a sort of sermon in which the writer seeks to find what is the real purpose for living. There is one assumption he made which is necessary to understand if the book is to make any sense to the pious reader. It is contained in the often-repeated expression “under the sun.” Verse 3 asks, “What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?” The words indicate a severe limitation to the study of purpose: there is nothing to be considered beyond a strictly material universe. No divine purposes, supernatural factors, or spiritual elements are to be involved. All is to be earthly: nothing beyond the sun, nothing beyond the solar system.

That sounds like much of modern science, with its insistence on leaving God and the Bible totally out of the picture.

Solomon concluded that all is vanity under the sun. If earthly life is studied just in a materialistic framework, it doesn't make sense at all. That is his repeated observation. So in the end he concluded that there must be something “beyond the sun,” if mortal man with a conscience is to find a life of meaning. His conclusion exhorts, “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (12:13, 14). There just has to be something “beyond the sun,” and there is!

### The Vanity of Cycles

The opening statement that all is vanity is supported by a review of earthly circumstances in which nature just seems to be going in circles and getting nowhere. Let us see a part of his summary: “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again” (1:4-7).

In effect he was saying, “All nature is just an endless pro-

cession of things going round and round, making no progress toward any ultimate goal. What sense is there in that?”

### Before Modern Science

In verses 10 and 11 he observed, “Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.”

A comment like that surely must have come before the rise of modern science. The common mood of today is rather the opposite of that. It would be more fitting today to ask, “Is there anything that is just like it was in Grandfather's day? Is there anything that is **not** new?” Science and technology have changed so many things that there seems to be very little of lasting value.

The key to modern science is hinted at in the next comment of the Preacher: “There is no remembrance of former things.” In those old days before the printing press, scientific libraries, and research centers, each generation had to learn about the same lessons that their forefathers learned in their generation. There was no way for each new generation to build effectively on the accumulated learnings of their forerunners, so they learned the same lessons over and over.

Today things are different! When the printing press made possible the rapid dissemination of recorded knowledge, so that children could study what had been learned by former generations, a rapidly escalating progression in knowledge began. And the escalation continues.

Just before the turn of the twentieth century, one scientist commented that since the atom had been discovered, there was nothing left for science to do except just refine its calculations to another decimal point. How wrong he was! Since then have come the automobile, the airplane, the astronaut — and the computer! There appears no end in sight.

Yet the same problem remains: What is the purpose in it all if there is nothing “beyond the sun”?

