

AMAZING FACTS

Zac Poonen

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CHAPTER 1

AMAZING FACTS ABOUT THE UNIVERSE

We are living in an age of scientific progress. In our generation we have seen man achieve some things that our forefathers considered impossible.

The pace at which science is progressing is perpetually accelerating. It has been estimated that the entire scientific knowledge that man had acquired from the time of his creation to 1750 A.D. was doubled all of a sudden within a period of 150 years by 1900 A.D. The knowledge that was man's by 1900 A.D. doubled again and this time in just 50 years - by 1950 A.D. This knowledge doubled again in just 10 years - by 1960. It has been estimated that man's scientific knowledge has been doubling thereafter every two and half years.

Take for instance the speed of travel, as one indication of scientific advance. 200 years ago man traveled on horseback just like his primitive ancestors did thousands of years earlier. But by 1900, man could travel by advanced means of locomotion at about 80 kilometres per hour and this was considered a very fast speed in those days. By 1945, jet planes had come into the air and man was traveling at 1000 kmph. Today, man travels in space at over 40,000 kmph.

We say that space has been conquered because man has reached the moon; but we must not forget that the moon is just on the fringe of space. Space itself is so vast that it staggers our imagination. Let's have a look at the universe and at space!

The average distance of the moon from the earth is about 400,000 kilometres. This is very small compared with the distance from the earth to the sun which is about 150 million kilometres. The distance of the sun looks quite considerable, but is actually quite negligible when compared with the distance of the nearest star.

When calculating distances to the stars, ordinary units of measurement will not do, for they lead us into fantastically large figures. Scientists and astronomers therefore use the "light year" as the unit of measurement - that is, the distance that light travels in one year.

Remember that light travels about 300,000 kilometres (or 7 times around the earth) in one second. So the distance that it travels in one year comes to over 9000 billion kilometres.

Let us consider the distances to some of the stars. The nearest star visible to the naked eye is a star called "Alpha Centauri" - which is four and a half light years away - that is, about 250,000 times the distance to the sun. This means that if you traveled at the speed of light, even though you would reach the moon in one and a half seconds and the sun in eight and a half minutes you would have to travel for four and a half years at that speed to reach "Alpha Centauri." To get a better idea of what this means, consider a scale model of the universe where the earth is represented by a grain of sand and the sun by a marble, 3 feet away from the earth. All the planets of our solar system would then come within a radius of 100 feet from the sun. But the nearest star would be 150 miles away from the earth on that scale model of the universe.

The farthest star visible to the naked eye is in the Andromeda Galaxy, which is more than 1.5 million light years away. There are still more distant galaxies that are visible through telescopes, 6,500 million light years away.

Now look at the sizes of some of the stars. They look so small that little children say "Twinkle, twinkle little star". The earth looks pretty large! It takes us many hours to get from one place to another on this earth. But the sun is so large that 1 million spheres the size of the earth could fit into it, if it were hollow. Yet even the sun is small compared to some stars. Some stars are so large that 500 million spheres the size of the sun could fit inside each of them if they were hollow.

The star Betelgeuse, 520 light years from the earth, is one of the bright stars of the Orion belt. Its diameter is 500 million kilometres - which means that if it were hollow, the earth could comfortably revolve around the sun, **INSIDE THIS STAR**, in its normal orbit! (The earth's orbit around the sun being only 300 million kilometres in diameter).

Now consider the number of the stars. Our solar system is part of a galaxy called the "Milky Way". Astronomers have estimated that there are at least 100,000 million stars in this galaxy. The sun is just one such star. And the Milky way is just one galaxy among many. Astronomers tell us that there are at least 100 million galaxies in the part of space that telescopes can see. There are many more beyond.

Consider too the perfect precision with which these heavenly bodies move in their orbits. The best man-made watch is not more precise than the stars in the heavens. Surely there must be a Supreme Intelligence behind this universe, that created and planned each star and planet.

How vast is space! How small is man! One of the writers in the Bible wrote thus, "When I look up into the night skies and see the stars, I can't understand oh God why you should pay any attention to puny man". Yet, God the creator of this universe cares for each of us. This is the marvelous truth we learn in the Bible.

The value of any article is not determined by its size. A millionaire may own acres of land. But his little child is more precious to him than all those large tracts of land. So with God. Space may be vast. The stars may be huge in their size. But God loves and cherishes man more than all of His creation. Man was created to be a son of God, to have fellowship with God. It is such a fellowship with God alone that can give meaning and purpose to man's existence.

We can see the greatness of God in creation. But the Bible reveals that this God is also One who loves us and cares for us.

CHAPTER 2

AMAZING FACTS ABOUT MAN

Man is the crown of God's creation. Greater and more wonderful than the stars in the universe is the wonder of man himself. Look at our bodies first of all and see how wonderfully God has created them.

Doctors tell us that the human brain has 30 billion nerve-cells, each operating at a potential of nearly one-tenth of a volt of electricity. Those over 35 years of age lose 1000 of these nerve cells every day - and these cells are never replaced. Yet the main functions of the brain carry on till the end of life - even though there is a slight loss in the sensitivity of the five senses.

Did you know, that each of our eyes has 130 million little rods for black and white vision and 7 million cones for colour vision? These are connected to the brain by 300,000 nerve fibres. The human eye can receive 1.5 million messages simultaneously! To duplicate the function of one eye, mechanically, it would require 250,000 television transmitters and receivers!

Consider the ear! The auditory nerve is only three-fourths of an inch long and has the diameter of an ordinary pencil-lead. But it has 30,000 electrical circuits within it. If we were to compare the human ear with a piano, whereas the piano key-board has 88 keys, the key-board of our inner ear has about 1100 within the same frequency range. In other words, it is so sensitive, that it can pick up 12 different tones between any two keys on the piano.

Now look at the heart and the blood-vessels. We don't usually think of them until they give us some trouble! But that heart which God has put within our bodies beats 40 million times every year, without any lubrication and without taking a vacation. Even though you didn't realize it, your heart beat within your body 100,000 times yesterday, pumping blood through 100,000 kilometers of blood-vessels from your head to your feet. Your body also produced more than 172 billion red blood-cells just yesterday to replace the damaged and worn out cells? Isn't it a miracle that you are alive today!

Consider the glands. The thyroid gland in our body requires only 1/5000th of a gram of iodine daily. Yet, if that microscopic amount had been lacking in you when you were a baby, you would certainly have been mentally retarded!

The pituitary gland is even more wonderful. Its daily output of hormones weighs only one-millionth of a gram. Yet even a slight increase or decrease in this output in a person, in his growing years, would make him physically and mentally abnormal! The reason we're healthy today is because the intricate working of our body-mechanism has been so perfect.

Truly as one Bible writer has said, "I will praise you Oh God, for I am wonderfully made!". The construction of the human body and the perfect balance that God has planned in it is indeed amazing. Of course, some of these marvels found in the human body are found in the bodies of animals too.

But then, man has a soul inside his body. A soul which constitutes his personality and that consists of his mind, his emotions and his will - a mind that thinks and reasons, emotions that make us feel, and will-power that enables us to make decisions. Animals have brains, but cannot reason. Man can think, put down his thinking in writing and thus pass on his knowledge to future generations - something animals can never do. (Birds still make their nests just like their ancestors did, thousands of years ago). Man's intellect is a part of God's image within him. It is a small bit of that supreme intelligence that is found in God.

But there is yet more to man. Man has not only a wonderful body and an even more wonderful soul. He has something far deeper and more wonderful than even his body and soul - a spirit. This distinguishes man from all the rest of creation on earth. This spirit in the deepest part of our being tells us that there is a God - a Supreme Being to whom we are morally accountable. It is not only the wonders of creation that teach us that there is a God. The spirit within us also tells us the same thing.

It is neither civilization nor education that teaches us that there is a God. It is not even religion. If you visited uncivilized people in the jungles of this world, you would find even among those barbarians a sense of God. They worship some object or the other because there is a spirit within them that tells them that there is a Supreme Being to whom they are accountable. They have a conscience within them that convicts them of wrong done. No animal has such innate feelings of guilt. You can train an animal to feel guilt; but no animal automatically feels guilt. Only man feels moral guilt because he alone has a spirit and a conscience. This is why all over the world people have some form of religion. But you never come across a religious monkey or a religious dog!

Man was created for something beyond his life's span on earth. God has placed within each of us a longing for something higher and greater than we can ever get on earth.

Man is a creature of eternity. Evolutionists may say that there is no difference between men and animals. Yet in every country, the law recognizes that killing a baby is a far

greater crime than killing an elephant. An elephant may be huge, but a small baby is far more precious because it is made in the image of God. Man is the crown of God's creation. He was created to have fellowship with God.

CHAPTER 3

AMAZING FACTS ABOUT TRUE REVOLUTION

There is a spirit of dissatisfaction in the world today - particularly among young people. There is a desire to overthrow the existing order and to seek for something better. Revolution is a popular word in our day. Revolution means change. We live in a day when there are social changes, economic changes and political changes. Fashions too change so rapidly. What is in fashion one year is not in fashion in the next. Even in the business world there is revolution. 65% of all products that are available in the world market today did not exist 5 years ago.

There is change all around us. People are seeking for something better. There is armed revolution in many countries. Yet, in spite of all this, things are only going from bad to worse. The newspapers are filled with news of famines and starvation-deaths, unemployment and violence, war and destruction.

To be dissatisfied with the existing state of affairs is not bad, if we are seeking the best for our community. Certainly we want better living conditions for our people. We want the people of our country and the people of the world to be free from want, each having a place to live in, clothes to wear and food to eat. We want the people of our country and of the world to enjoy greater liberty and freedom. In fact, being content with the state of affairs and being silent about it is often a mark of death. Only dead people are content with the status quo. There is no revolution in a graveyard! But then there is no progress there either!

We may be living in a free country. But do we know true liberty in our personal lives? Man has progressed scientifically, but retarded morally. Most countries in the world are independent today; but man himself is still in bondage. He is unable to conquer his selfishness and his base passions even though he has external freedom. The Bible says, "It is better to control one's passions than to rule a country."

Revolution involves an overthrowing of the existing order. In this sense, Jesus Christ was the greatest revolutionary this world has ever seen. The only difference being that whereas other revolutionaries taught external revolution, Jesus Christ taught an inward one. Christ hit the root of the problem and taught that what man needed was a revolution that took place within him.

When man experiences this internal revolution, then the external will take care of itself. We need to deal with the root cause of the problem first. A doctor when treating a patient,

does not treat the external symptoms alone. He treats the disease itself. For example, a man suffering from cancer may complain of a lack of appetite. A doctor would be quite foolish if he treats the man merely for lack of appetite, without treating the cancer. And those who think of external revolution as the solution to our problems, are making the same mistake. They are trying to get rid of the symptoms. But the disease itself still remains.

What is the existing order within man which needs to be overthrown? Man today lives a self independent of God. Even religious men seek their own in so many ways. God does not enter into their reckoning when they plan their lives. To overthrow this order means to come to the place where man lives in dependence upon God. This is the spiritual revolution that Jesus Christ came to bring. And this is what many are experiencing today, throughout the world.

Consider another area where we need revolution. All of us have inherited a religion from our parents. Along with that religion we have inherited certain prejudices that we have developed and built up through the years. In matters of religion, unfortunately, most men do not think for themselves. They have a priest or a pastor to do their thinking for them. Yet thinking on spiritual matters is the most fruitful activity that any man can engage in. We must determine to know the truth about God accurately. We cannot afford to be mistaken in this matter.

Consider how things would have been if man had refused to think for himself in the realm of science. If men had always accepted what their forefathers had believed there would have been no progress in the realm of science at all.

Here's one example: For thousands of years, men believed that the earth was the centre of the universe, and that the sun and stars revolved around it. But 450 years ago, a man named Copernicus questioned what all his forefathers had believed and proved them to be wrong.

Science is progressing, because scientists do not blindly accept what their forefathers believed. A century ago people believed that there could be no such thing as a flying machine. Today, people travel all over the world in aeroplanes. At the beginning of this century nobody believed that an atom could be split. Today, the atom has been split. A few years ago no one believed that man would ever land on the moon; but man has landed on the moon too.

It is only in the realm of religion, alas, that people blindly accept what their parents or priests have taught them. What about you? What are your religious convictions? Are they merely what you have blindly inherited from your forefathers? Or do you have convictions of your own, concerning God and eternity, that you have thrashed out in your own mind, and are now sure of?

Jesus Christ was the greatest revolutionary the world has seen, because He came to change men from the inside. And when man is changed on the inside, the ills of the world

and of society will be remedied too. Not before then. Until man himself has been changed, there is no solution to the problems that face our world and society.

CHAPTER 4

AMAZING FACTS ABOUT OUR GREATEST NEED

What is man's greatest need?

Have you ever thought about that?

Is it food or shelter or employment?

There is no doubt that we need all these. Without them we could not exist. We need food for our bodies, we need clothing to wear, we need shelter and we need employment to support ourselves and our families. We cannot devalue the importance of any of these. But in the materialistic age in which we live today, man's great danger is forgetting that he is not a creature of time, but of eternity - that within his body there dwells a spirit, which in terms of relative values is far more important than the body. The body and its needs are important, but the spirit and its needs are far more important.

If you had a pet dog in your house that became sick, you would take it to the veterinary doctor and get it treated. But if you had a sick child at home at the same time and you had to choose between taking the child or the dog to the doctor, you would certainly take your child first. Not because your dog is not important, but because your child is more important. In just the same way, the spirit within us is far more important than our body.

Have you ever considered the matter of your spirit's needs, with an unprejudiced mind? Prejudice is a deadly thing that blinds people's minds and prevents them from coming to a true understanding of God, a true understanding of their spiritual need and a true understanding of the reason for their existence on earth. Many live with unsolved problems all their lives because they have approached life with preconceived ideas and prejudices.

Are you willing to approach the truth concerning religion and eternity with an open mind? You may find that some facts are different from what you have always believed to be true. But before we proceed further, do you really want to know the truth at any cost? If you are in dead earnest, you can know the truth. Not otherwise. The Bible says that God rewards those who diligently seek Him. Any man, woman or child, from any religion, can know the truth about God and Jesus Christ, if he seeks it with an open mind and with all his heart.

What happens to a man when he dies? Is death a cessation of all existence? No. Life on earth is an introduction to eternity. We are on probation here on earth and God is watching us. Our life here on earth is going to determine what our eternity is going to be like. God knows the real truth about each of our lives. We may fool our friends about our goodness, but we can't fool God. In God's eyes all are guilty for we have all come short of His high and holy standards. Man was created to have fellowship with God. If he doesn't have this, he has failed to fulfill the primary purpose of his existence on earth. This fellowship with God can never be enjoyed till the guilt of his sin is removed.

What do we consider God to be like? People in the world have different ideas about God. But no one has ever seen God at anytime. And so all our own ideas about God are useless. The Bible says that Jesus Christ came down to earth from Heaven and revealed God to man. He was God manifest in human form. Here is the truth: Jesus Christ revealed God, as a God full of holiness and full of love.

How can the guilt of our sin be removed from our lives? Many people have a great problem with guilt in their lives? They do not find a solution. But there is an answer in Jesus Christ! What is it?

It is not enough merely to repent and feel sorry. If I were convicted in court of a bank robbery and my father were the judge, he could not let me go just because I was sorry for what I had done. He may love me as my father but he sits there in court as a judge. And so he has to punish me for the crime that I've committed, even if I am sorry and even if he loves me as his son.

If we believe in a God who is just, we must surely recognize that He must be more just than human beings. How then can He let us off merely because we are sorry or merely because He loves us? He is perfectly just; and justice demands punishment.

But my father can do something in court that could help me. He could fine me the full penalty of the law and say - "You are fined Rs.100,000/-". He could then take Rs.100,000/- of his own hard-earned money and give it to me saying - "Son, here's the money! Go, pay your fine and be free!" Do you see what he has done? As a judge he punished me and as a father he paid the punishment himself. This is what God has done. He says to all mankind - "You are guilty and the punishment you deserve is death." As a Judge He punishes us. But then He also loves us and so came down in the person of Jesus Christ and paid that punishment Himself. This is why Christ died - to pay the penalty for our guilt. The proof that this is true lies in the fact that Christ came out alive from the grave, three days after He had died. Jesus Christ overcame death. He is living today.

These are facts for us to believe. But there is something for us to DO as well. When my father offers me the money in the court, if I don't receive it from his hand, I cannot go free. Similarly the pardon that God offers us in Jesus Christ has to be received. If we don't accept it, we can never benefit from it. God offers you pardon in Jesus Christ today. But you have to choose to receive it.

CHAPTER 5

AMAZING FACTS ABOUT ADDICTION AND FRUSTRATION

People all over the world are chasing after one or more of four things: PLEASURE, FAME, WEALTH and POWER.

But there is a law connected with these that we would all do well to know in advance. We could call it the law of diminishing returns.

Take for instance, the pursuit of pleasure as an example, to understand how this law operates. Initially, a pleasure gives quite a bit of satisfaction, when indulged in, in small doses - whether that pleasure be from tobacco, alcoholic drinks, rock-music, drugs, pornography or illegitimate sex. But once indulged in, these things begin to tighten their grip on their victim, until he becomes an addict, unable to live without the stimulation of that pleasure.

But further, the addict gradually finds each time, that the dose of the stimulant that he took on previous occasions does not give him the same degree of satisfaction now as it did previously. He needs to take a greater dose now to get the same degree of pleasure. This is the law of diminishing returns. In the case of addiction to alcohol and drugs, the body and mind of the individual are finally ruined. In the case of addiction to pornography and sex, the addict goes on from normal sex to perversions and thus becomes subhuman and in some cases even worse than the animals. In each case, the victim finds himself gripped as in a carpenter's vice, unable to extricate himself.

Even the pursuit of the more refined forms of pleasure - such as the pleasure that comes from some accomplishment in the realms of science or music - does not fully satisfy; this too being subject to the law of diminishing returns.

This law operates in exactly the same way in the pursuit of fame, wealth and power as well - making addicts and ruining them - though perhaps in less ugly ways than the drug addict or sex-addict.

Consider the pursuit of fame. In school-days, this begins with just seeking to be popular with one's friends. Then the pursuit of fame continues - whether in the field of athletics, cinema, sport, or whatever - from one degree to another. One who achieves city-wide fame now looks for nation-wide fame and then for world-wide fame. In this pursuit, the person may develop ulcers in his stomach, compromise his convictions and even climb on the shoulders of others, ruining them, in order to get to the top himself. And what is his reward at the end of it all? With nothing more to conquer he is frustrated. Many film stars and other famous people have committed suicide because of their inner frustrations, despite their popularity.

Consider how this law operates in the pursuit of wealth. Initially, a man may start a business enterprise purely with the aim of earning a living. But gradually the accumulation of profits beyond his family's needs, leads him to think in terms of the expansion of his business empire. Thus begins a heated chase after wealth that never ends - for although this world has enough material resources to meet every man's needs, it does not have enough to satisfy even one man's GREED. Money and material things have a power to grip a man and to give him less and less satisfaction in life. The accumulation of material things, which a man once thought would make his life and his home happy now ceases to bring happiness. The law of diminishing returns operates here too. The electronic gadgets, the rich food, the thrill of traveling and seeing places, the high society life, etc., which he has attained through the accumulation of wealth, now satisfy him less and less. There is something hollow and empty about them all. He finds that he was happier and less tense when he had less wealth. His marital happiness, he finds, has also decreased. Thus the words of the Lord Jesus Christ are proved true, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of things that he possesses".

Consider, how this law operates in the pursuit of power and positions of honour too - whether in politics or in any other realm. In politics, for example, a man who once longed just to be elected as a Member of Parliament, now finds that he is not satisfied. He now has his eyes on a ministership. He will find at last that even if he attained the highest position in the country, he would still be frustrated and uneasy. As the old saying goes, "Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown." He was not in danger of being assassinated when he was unknown!

Why is it thus in all these realms?

Within each of us there is a vacuum that can be filled only by God. Man is constantly seeking to fill that vacuum with pleasure, fame, wealth or power. But it is a futile pursuit. The ultimate result is always frustration because we are never satisfied.

The Bible says that God has placed eternity in man's heart. Someone has expressed it like this: "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God."

The law of diminishing returns is a law that God Himself has placed upon the pursuit of all that is great and attractive in this world, so that man will realize that he is a creature of eternity. He has been made with a spiritual vacuum that cannot be filled apart from the Holy Spirit of God.

But just as a cup needs to be clean before it is filled with anything worth drinking, so too our heart needs to be cleansed from sin before it can be filled with the Spirit of God. Christ died for our sins, so that our hearts might be cleansed from sin and made pure.

True and lasting satisfaction that overcomes all unrest in our hearts can be found only as we acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord over every area of our life.

CHAPTER 6

AMAZING FACTS ABOUT THE FINAL JUDGMENT

Life on this earth is not everything. Our life is a countdown to death. Day by day the count goes down to the day when we shall finally end up in the grave. And at death, like the space rocket, we take off. What is death? It is a separation of our soul and spirit from the body. The important question at that time is "Where are we going"? Do you know your destination?

Life after death is more important than life on earth. Eternity is more important than time. Where we are going to spend eternity is far more important than where and how we spend our lives on earth. The foolish person is short-sighted and thinks only in terms of this life. The wise person looks to the future and prepares for eternity.

Consider as an illustration, a young man who has inherited a fortune of many millions of rupees and who has decided to settle down in Bangalore. On his way there he spends a couple of days in Bombay. He spends money lavishly on himself during those two days and gambles and loses his fortune completely. When he finally reaches Bangalore, he is penniless and spends the remaining sixty years of his life begging on the streets of the city, with no place to stay.

What would you call such a man? Surely, "A fool". A far greater fool is the one who thinks only in terms of this life and neglects eternity. For the length of our life on earth, even if it be a hundred years, is only a fraction of a second when compared to eternity.

The Bible says that a day is coming when each of us will have to give an account of our earthly lives to God. When we consider all the billions of people who have lived on this earth during the many centuries of man's history, we may wonder how God keeps a record of everything that every man did, said and thought, during his lifetime. This record is kept by each man's memory.

Memory is like a video-tape that faithfully records everything that we do, say and think. It also records our inner attitudes and motives. When a person dies, although he leaves his body behind on earth, his memory being a part of his soul, goes with his soul to the place of dead spirits. When the day of judgment finally comes, he will stand before God to give an account to Him of his entire life on earth.

In that day, when each person's turn comes for judgment, God will only have to replay the video-tape of the man's own memory for everyone to see the record of his life. No-one will be able to question the accuracy of that display for it will be his own memory recounting the details of his earthly life.

