

THE

# LIVING

# CHURCH NEWS

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## Do You Thank God for Christ's Sacrifice?

Dear Brethren and Friends,

Each of us need to ask ourselves, “Am I a real Christian?” As the entire world begins to explode around us, we had *better be sure!*

We in the Church of God know that we are commanded by God to keep **all ten** of the Ten Commandments (Matthew 5:17–19, etc.). We are to live by *every* word of God (Luke 4:4). We are to help prepare for the coming Kingdom of God and “*do the Work.*” For Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to *finish His work.* Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest?’ Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together” (John 4:34–36).

All of that is *very good.* But what is the *single issue* that the early Apostles—and all Christians—focused on the most? What was the source of their **passion** for God in those original days of Christianity? In his powerful sermon on the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter cried out, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (Acts 2:22–24).

Later, the Jewish priests and leaders were “greatly disturbed” that the Apostles “taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:2).

Then the inspired Peter told them to “let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (vv. 10–12). Not only to the Jews, but throughout the entire book of Acts, we see that the wonderful message of Jesus as our Savior and living Head was preached to **both** Jews and Gentiles.

In dealing with the Gentile convert Cornelius, the Roman centurion, we see that God guided Peter, in his message to Cornelius and his Gentile friends and family, to emphasize the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter explained, “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly” (Acts 10:38–40).

In his famous prison epistles—primarily addressed to the Gentile churches of Asia Minor—the Apostle Paul constantly emphasized the key focus on Jesus Christ as our Savior.



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Paul wrote the Corinthians, “For I determined not to know **anything** among you except *Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Later, Paul explained the **Gospel** that he and the other Apostles preached to the original Church of God: “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve” (1 Corinthians 15:1–5).

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death” (Philippians 1:18–20). Also, Paul wrote the Colossians regarding God’s deliverance through Christ’s sacrifice, “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13–14).

Brethren, I gave a sermon several years ago entitled, “We Are the Church of the Forgiveness!” In that sermon, I explained how, on at least two or three occasions, Herbert W. Armstrong proclaimed before the entire Headquarters congregation and ministry that we—as a Church—often **failed** to emphasize the *sacrifice of our Savior* nearly as much as we should. Mr. Armstrong acknowledged that—in reacting to “mainstream” Christianity’s sole emphasis on the *Person* of Jesus Christ, rather than His *message*—he had unwittingly led us into an approach of “taking Christ for granted.” He stated *many*

*times* that each of us must have a deep, *heartfelt feeling* of *gratefulness* for what Jesus Christ did in pouring out His blood for **our sins!**

Does this mean that we should not emphasize the powerful message of the soon-coming Kingdom of God in our preaching and writing? *Of course not!*

However, it does mean that we should make mention of Jesus Christ in our preaching, our writing, in our prayers and in our thoughts and actions as a **vital part** of that total message! For Christ will soon be the **King** of that coming Kingdom. By giving His *very life* and shedding His **blood** for us, Jesus is the One who gains us access to the Kingdom of God and eternal life in the first place! He is now our living High Priest and Head—guiding the Church in preaching the “Gospel of the Kingdom” and in honoring **Him** as well. So we must **never** forsake that

vital component of the **true Gospel!** We must **never** water it down or hold back from *pouring out our hearts* to God in thankfulness and praise for giving His Son to reconcile us to Him and to help us gain access to the Holy Spirit and to eternal life.

So, we will **continue** to emphasize the message of the **Kingdom of God**—as we have *always done*. But, as thousands of “brand new” members come into the Living Church of God, it is *my responsibility*—as the one **God** used to raise up this present Work—to be *absolutely sure* that we do not “forsake” the emphasis which **God’s inspired word** places on the vital importance of Christ’s life and example, His **death** for our sins and His present work of **living His life** within us through the Holy Spirit (Galatians 2:20). All of us should periodically “examine ourselves” as to our relationship with Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Do **you**, dear brethren, fervently realize your *personal* need for **forgiveness** from **your sins**? Do **you** meditate on this and pray about it? Do **you** regularly “confess” your sins to God and ask Him to *forgive* them through the shed blood of His Son, Jesus Christ?

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# EDITORIAL

## AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

By Roderick C. Meredith

**D**o you want to be more like King David of Israel—the “man after God’s own heart”? (Acts 13:22). Through most of my Christian life, King David and the Apostle Paul were my main biblical heroes—apart from Jesus Christ Himself (as I have grown older, I have added Abraham and the beloved Apostle John to this list, but that is another story).

Over the years, I have studied King David’s life, and have preached several sermons on why he was a man “after God’s own heart.” I have written a number of articles on this as well.

Now, however, I want to zero in on just *one often-neglected aspect* of David’s relationship with God. We in the very Church of God should earnestly be trying to grow closer and closer to God *in every way*. Through fervent prayer, and through God’s Holy Spirit, we should all strive to achieve a deep closeness to God and to our Savior, Jesus Christ. We should try to obey *fully* what the Son of God Himself stated was the “great commandment in the law.” For Jesus said: “You shall love the LORD your God with *all* your heart, with *all* your soul, and with *all* your mind” (Matthew 22:36–37).

### How DAVID LOVED GOD

There were two primary ways by which King David obeyed this fundamental command. First, as we all know, David sincerely

loved God’s law and meditated on it constantly. We read David’s words on this in Psalm 119:97–99: “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my

**WE IN THE VERY CHURCH OF GOD SHOULD EARNESTLY BE TRYING TO GROW CLOSER AND CLOSER TO GOD IN EVERY WAY. THROUGH FERVENT PRAYER, AND THROUGH GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT, WE SHOULD ALL STRIVE TO ACHIEVE A DEEP CLOSENESS TO GOD AND TO OUR SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.**

teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation.” And again: “I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end” (v. 112).

*No wonder* David will once again be “king over all Israel” under Jesus Christ in Tomorrow’s World! *No one* has had more direct experience in administering God’s law and His form of government over an entire nation than has King David. Christ’s soon-coming government will be fundamentally based on God’s commandments, and on the statutes as they are spiritually understood and administered under the New Covenant.

Christ’s government will also be *hierarchical*—with those in authority *appointed* to their offices. There will be **no voting** and *no politics*, but rather a deep faith that *Christ* will install the right people in each office. That is why it is *vitaly important* that we in God’s Church today learn to *teach* and *practice* God’s form of government in the Church—looking *in faith* to our living Head, Jesus Christ, to guide and orchestrate the government in *His* Church. For if we do not even have the faith *now* to **trust** Christ to lead His Church, *how* can we expect to have any significant responsibility in His soon-coming government?

The other **key** manner in which David expressed his profound love for God was in his attitude of being *deeply thankful, appreciative* and *worshipful* before God in a manner beyond what most men in human history have ever exhibited. The Psalms of David reveal, in a remarkable way, what David was thinking and feeling—while he was literally *fleeing for his life* from King Saul, while David was desperately sick or emotionally distraught, or when he realized the *awfulness* of his sin in the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba. These are the thoughts and feelings of one of the greatest men of God ever. They are worthy of our deep and prayerful study and consideration.

When David had to flee from his rebellious son, Absalom, he wrote: “LORD, how they have

increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, ‘There is no help for him in God.’ Selah. But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head. I cried to the LORD with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill. Selah” (Psalm 3:1–4). When David was finally delivered from Saul, he wrote this prayer of exultation: “I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies” (Psalm 18:1–3).

### DAVID’S AWE OF GOD’S GREAT POWER

Later in this magnificent psalm of praise, David described the *glory* and the *power* of the God he served. “Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; coals were kindled by it.... The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world were uncovered at Your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils” (vv. 7–8; 13–15). Here, David pictured his God as literally **shaking** the earth, and described God’s voice as *rolling thunder*. Those of you who have lived in parts of the earth where violent lightning and thunderstorms literally *shake the earth* can grasp the awesome power of God that David portrayed in his psalms.

His absolute worship of the great God, and his deep awe of God’s power, gave David great faith and courage. When Goliath, the giant, came

powerfully striding toward David, “cursed David by his gods” (1 Samuel 17:43), and threatened to destroy him, the valiant young man was imbued with remarkable faith and courage. For David’s mind was **not** on himself—that is the **key**—but on the awesome power and majesty of God. So David cried out, with a great confidence, toward the giant Philistine: “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” (vv. 45–46).

David’s absolute faith that the wonderful God he served would “take care of things” helped prevent him from executing King Saul while Saul was still **God’s anointed**. Even when Saul was absolutely helpless before David—fast asleep—David did not permit the warrior Abishai to kill him. “But David said to Abishai, ‘Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD’s anointed, and be guiltless?’ David said furthermore, ‘As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD’s anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head, and let us go’” (1 Samuel 26:9–11). David would not have had this attitude toward a man who had tried, again and again, to kill him—*unless* he constantly pictured his God, the “Rock” of Israel, as being very real, totally fair and a God who would always *make things right* in the end!

For David *worshipped* and *adored* God. Out under the stars at night,

David exclaimed: “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You



are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor... O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!” (Psalm 8:3–5, 9).

When David was deeply troubled by sickness and infection, he cried out: “O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure! For Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness” (Psalm 38:1–5). Yet even in the depths of his despondency and pain, David fixed his mind on *God’s faithfulness*. “For in You, O LORD, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God” (v. 15).

When David began to profoundly repent of his vile sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, once again he *fixed his mind* on God and His mercy, and on God’s purpose in all our lives: “Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:14–17).

Certainly, David continually focused his thoughts on the love, the mercy and the greatness of God. The entirety of Psalm 103 is a magnificent expression of the love and worship David constantly expressed toward his Creator: “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.... The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.... For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (vv. 1–4, 8, 11–14).

### MAKE TIME FOR GOD

Dear brethren, in our confused and utterly materialistic society—where we are daily and almost hourly bombarded with the sounds and images of the television, telephone, computer, radio, traffic outside and perhaps even helicopters whirling overhead—it is often difficult for us to concentrate on the *beauty*, the *mercy*, the profound *wisdom* and the awesome *power* of the great God who made us in His image. Yet, if we are to be like David—the man “after God’s own heart”—we will have to so organize our lives that we also quietly, slowly and thoughtfully *drink in of God’s word* and *meditate on God’s law* as David did. We must *find time* to go outside and look at the trees, flowers and plants, and the sun, moon and stars that our God and Creator has made. Then, as David did, we must *take time* to pour out our hearts to God in sincere thanks, worship and adoration. We should all be able to say with David: “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17).

True Christians should be quick to follow David’s example. They should be filled with zest, enthusiasm and **purpose**, as they have a real reason for living. They have genuine goals and projects that they want to accomplish! Zealous converted Christians will want to be sure to take **time** for proper Bible study, for fervent and intensive prayer and for practicing the art of



meditation—thinking things through carefully and truly contemplating God’s law and all its ramifications as King David did (Psalm 119:97). And they will set aside time for **fasting** regularly, to spend extra time in a situation of humility and purpose—seeking God intensely.

David was a very busy man. Yet he made time for God! He sought God with all his heart! Brethren, in all of our Christian lives, we must learn to think through our use of **time**. Simple as it sounds, we must be sure that we “take time” to really study God’s word and “feed” upon it, to pray fervently and unhurriedly to God, to meditate and to **fast** before our Creator so that we have the spiritual strength that can come only from contact with God.

God our Father, and Jesus Christ our Savior, should *both* be at the very center of our being. They are truly **one**—as Jesus said: “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30). Our hopes,

dreams, thoughts and plans should *all* revolve around God and what *He* wants us to do and to be. As *David profoundly understood*, and as the Apostle Paul expressed: “In *Him* we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

In Psalm 104, David described the beauty and the wisdom in God’s creation. He wrote of how God stretches out the heavens “like a curtain.” He described how God’s voice sounds like “thunder.” He noted how “He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man’s heart” (vv. 14–15). David exults: “O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions—this great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great” (vv. 24–25).

Then King David of Israel cried out from the depths of his being: “I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the LORD. May sinners be consumed from the earth, and the wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, O my soul! Praise the LORD!” (vv. 33–35).

Will you and I “sing to the Lord” as long as we have our lives? Will we “sing praises to God” while we have our being? Are our heavenly Father, and our personal Lord who died for us—Jesus Christ, “the Lord God of the armies of Israel”—the *real focus* of our lives, our plans and all that we hope for?

Brethren, let us sincerely pray to our God that we—and all our brethren in God’s Church—may learn to seek God with all our hearts, *walk* with Him, *love* Him and constantly praise and thank and worship Him *as King David did!* Then, truly, we will become a people “after God’s own heart.” Then, God will bless us, deliver us, heal us and in every way “cause His face to shine upon us” as never before. ■

# MAKE THE MOST OF PREPARATION DAY

By Dexter B. Wakefield

**P**icture a jet plane landing on an aircraft carrier at sea. An F-18 descends at a steep angle with engines screaming, landing gear extended, flaps down, and a tail-hook trailing behind. Then it slams onto the carrier deck in what aviators call a “controlled crash.” The tail-hook rakes the deck until it snags a cable, and the powerful jet grinds to a halt. Everyone sighs, “He made it!”

Does your Sabbath begin that way—like a carrier landing in rough seas? Is your Friday evening spent scrambling to get ready, feeling guilty about doing so much on the Sabbath? Does the Sabbath sometimes become as stressful as a weekday, because of lack of preparation? Or, rather, when the sun goes down on Friday, does a spirit of *peace* settle upon your household? Are you able to say, “God’s holy time is certainly a delight!”?

The Bible tells us that the *sixth day* of the week has a special purpose. Though the day is not set aside as “holy time,” Scripture describes its important role as a day of preparation. Understanding and using the day in the way God intended can help us properly observe the holy time that follows on the Sabbath.

Consider that a delightful Sabbath does not just happen by itself. It must have God’s blessing, and it requires some effort on our part. One valuable tool God has given us to help us in our efforts is the Day of Preparation. The Fourth Commandment states, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...” and keeping the Sabbath holy *in spirit* often requires some planning.

## FOUR POINTS ABOUT THE SABBATH

The Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8–11) is comprehensive in its scope, telling us four things:

(1) **What** we are commanded to do: “Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.”

(2) **When** we are commanded to do it: “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God.”

(3) **How** we are commanded to do it: “In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your

male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.”

(4) **Why** we are commanded to do it: “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and *hallowed* it.” God was not tired on the seventh day. He rested in the sense that He ceased or

came to a stop from His work. It is used here in the same sense that an attorney in court says, “Your Honor, I rest my case.”

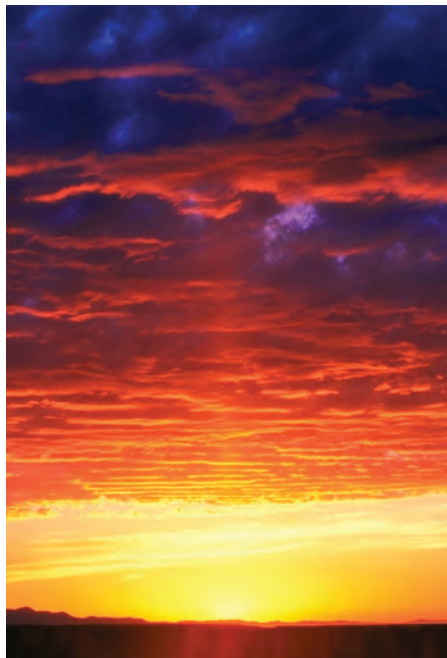
As He did with the Fifth Commandment—“Honor your father and your mother”—God chose to state the Fourth Commandment *affirmatively*, as something we *must do*: keep it holy. We do so by ceasing from our labors. Bringing our weekly commercial activities into the Sabbath would profane what God has set apart for a divine purpose.

By contrast, other commandments such as “Thou shalt not... kill... steal... commit adultery... bear false witness” are stated *prohibitively*—as things we *must not do*. Remembering what the Sabbath commandment actually is, can be very helpful in resolving “Sabbath issues.”

For instance, in deciding whether or not to do something on the Sabbath,

people will often ask the question, “Is the activity work?” That may be fine, but often the better question is, “Does the activity profane the Sabbath?” Consider that deacons, elders and pastors are usually very busy people on the Sabbath, but their activities are *set apart* for God’s Work and are righteous in God’s sight. On the other hand, if people are sitting perfectly still in Church services—but while doing so are making plans for solving problems on the job the following week—they need to repent. The Sabbath is *set apart* for other things.

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was unequivocal when he wrote, “Observe more closely, now, the Sabbath command. ‘REMEMBER the Sabbath day, to keep it holy’ (Exodus 20:8).” He expounded: “Whenever that time comes to us, we are in holy time! It is GOD’S time, not ours! God MADE it HOLY—and in the Ten Commandments, as we shall see in detail a little later, He commanded us to keep it holy! Many do not realize today that it is a SIN to profane that which is HOLY to God!” (*Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?*, pp. 44, 25).



To disobey any of God's commandments is sin. God also uses His commandments—especially the Fourth Commandment—to teach and to identify His people. The weekly day of rest follows six days of labor in a world held captive by a profane adversary. But the seventh day of rest pictures the Millennial rest of Christ (Hebrews 4), a picturing that we carry out weekly, to remind and teach us continually about God's coming Kingdom. *The Sabbath is holy because what it pictures—the Kingdom of God—is holy!*

### THE SABBATH IS...

The Sabbath is a lot more than simply not working. It is: **Holy time.** We are commanded to keep it holy by ceasing from our labors. If we allow the week's activities to intrude on our Sabbath, then they will profane something about which God has commanded us, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

**Sanctified and separate.** Sabbath time is *set apart* and *different* from the rest of the week, just as God's Holy Kingdom will be different from this profane age that is ruled by the god of this world.

**A cessation of our customary weekly activities** in favor of spiritual recreation, regeneration, sanctified activity and service. It is time to be refreshed! God said that He was refreshed on the first Sabbath (Exodus 31:17). The age to come is a time of refreshing (Isaiah 28:12; Acts 3:19). *We need our Sabbath rest just as this world needs Christ's Millennial rest.*

**A feast day** that we celebrate. Since it pictures God's future millennial rest, in an important sense it is like a weekly version of the Feast of Tabernacles.

**A day of peace.** The Sabbath reminds us that there will be peace in the Kingdom of God, when "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:7).

**A family day,** for both our physical and Church families. The Sabbath reminds us that we will all be together as the glorified God Family in His Kingdom.

The holiness of the Sabbath is *a delight* and *a thing of great value* that God made for us as a blessing. "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. (Isaiah 58:13–14; see also Exodus 20:11).

It is no coincidence that God's holy people keep "the holy day of the Lord" as a sign, and *they delight* in doing so. Keeping the Sabbath in spirit involves *magnifying its sanctity*. That is a delightful duty!

Is your Sabbath all of these things? If not, there is a tool that can help you: *Preparation*.

### PREPARATION DAY IN THE BIBLE

When God brought Israel out of Egypt and revealed the Sabbath to them, He also gave instructions on how to prepare for it. "And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall *prepare* what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.... And so it was on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread.... Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.... So the people rested on the seventh day" (Exodus 16:5–30).

Preparation for God's holy time is mentioned in the New Testament as well. "Now when the evening had come, because it was *the Preparation Day*, that is, the day before the Sabbath" (Mark 15:42). It is of such importance that the Bible goes so far as to *name* this advance time—"the Preparation Day."

### AN ERA OF PREPARATION

As we go about our weekly preparation for Sabbath, *we should remember that we are in an era of preparation for the coming millennial Sabbath.* In fact, God Himself is now preparing for that glorious time to come. Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places...I go to *prepare* a place for you" (John 14:2, NRSV). We understand this to mean that Christ and the Father are now preparing the future duties, responsibilities and offices that the resurrected saints will be given at Christ's return. We are also told that God has "*prepared* a city" for us—i.e. the New Jerusalem (Hebrews 11:16). And who has prepared us for immortality in His Kingdom? We know that "He who has *prepared* us for this very thing" is God (2 Corinthians 5:5).

While the Almighty prepares for the future, laying some of the groundwork by the working of the Holy Spirit in His begotten children, it is incumbent upon us to prepare for the Kingdom as well. Christ told the disciples the parable of the ten virgins. When the bridegroom came, five were ready and five were not. And only those who were *prepared* entered into the wedding. The Church is the Bride of Christ, and we must now be preparing for that great time. "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and *His wife has made herself ready* [She is prepared!]. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.... Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:7–9).

In this present world, we are nearing the end of our preparation time—with the sun sinking low on the horizon of the sixth millennial day of this profane age. We should be working towards the great seventh millennial day where Christ will rule with perfect justice. We must be ready and prepared when our Lord comes! The day before the weekly Sabbath—the "Preparation Day"—should operate as a weekly reminder

of our current work as members of God's Church, just as the Sabbath is a weekly reminder of the great millennial rest. We should be striving to prepare our homes for a delightful weekly Sabbath—both physically and spiritually—just as we are preparing our lives, God's house and God's Work for the coming of our Lord and His millennial rest.

As we love and desire God's Kingdom, even so we should love and desire His Sabbath. If we truly *love the Sabbath* for the important occasion that it is, then we will want to get ready for it ahead of time to make it what it should be. To this end, advance planning and preparation are invaluable.

### SOME GOALS TO PURSUE

Try to organize your household and weekly work so that physical considerations do not pursue you into the Sabbath, distracting you from this Holy Day's spiritual nature. This should typically be the responsibility of all family members—for functional reasons and also so that all can benefit from the spiritual lessons of Preparation Day. When the wife works outside the home, the husband should generally be especially engaged in helping with preparations. Children should pitch in, as well. Even if small children may not always be a tremendous help in putting your house in order, active participation is a wonderful opportunity for them to learn the value of preparing for the Sabbath day.

Of course, family situations vary widely, and each family's balance of preparation duties will be unique. Remember that if you purposefully plan and prepare to make the Sabbath a delight, God will see your active love and desire to properly keep His Sabbath holy. He will bless and magnify the fruits of your efforts.

### HELPFUL HINTS

Following are some of the tips that my wife and some other women have accumulated over the years from their experience in the Church. These, of course, are only tips. It should be remembered that how people manage their households is a personal matter. And how people prepare will vary widely depending on individual tastes and circumstances.

*Remember that Preparation Day begins Thursday night.* There are some things you can get ready *earlier* than Friday if you want to—even during the week. This is especially helpful and even essential for families where both spouses work outside the home. Some examples might be:

- Plan meals for Sabbath evening, Sabbath morning and Saturday night. If possible, plan for Friday dinner to be the nicest of the week.

- Shop for groceries.
- Finish at least part of the major housecleaning.
- When appropriate, begin cooking for Sabbath meals.

You may want to fix a double portion of a dish for Thursday's dinner and serve the rest on Sabbath.

- Do some of the packing for Church services including children's bags, diapers and quilts.
- If necessary, get any cash that may be needed for the weekend.

- Make sure you have enough gas in the car.

Again, please remember that *every family is different in terms of specific needs and work schedules that may lead to their particular priorities for preparation.* And remember: we should not be judgmental of one another. What works well for some may not work well for others.

In any case, each family will find that some tasks are best suited for Thursday evening, while others are better handled on Friday. The key is to focus on planning to set God's holy time apart from customary labors—i.e. *plan* to make the Sabbath's holiness a delight.

- Before sunset on Friday, you might want to set the prettiest table of the week and prepare the best meal possible. After all, it is a feast day! Candles and flowers can make the meal special, and should not “break the budget” when used occasionally.

- Finish the cooking (or warming up the dishes that were prepared earlier in the week) and do the last household chores. If you are going to be cooking late Friday afternoon, clean up as you cook to make the cleanup simpler. The dishwasher can be emptied and ready to use after dinner.

- Set aside the clothes you will wear to Sabbath services, and be sure they are ready to wear.

### MORE SABBATH SUGGESTIONS

Remember that Satan *hates* the Sabbath, because he knows what it pictures. He will do anything he can to spoil, disrupt and profane what God has set apart to be a delight. However, if we prepare, we can successfully resist his efforts.

Do employment-related phone calls intrude on your Sabbath? Consider screening calls with an answering machine. Jesus explained that it was quite permissible to pull your ox or donkey—i.e. work animals—out of the ditch on the Sabbath (Luke 14:5). *Showing mercy* to a person or an animal in pain or need on the Sabbath does not profane it. Jesus explained that *showing genuine mercy is consistent with the holiness of the Sabbath.* But make sure that you are dealing with a real need



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# TWELVE TRAITS OF GREAT TEACHERS

**GOD HAS CALLED US TO PREPARE TO BE KINGS AND PRIESTS. ONE OF THE GREATEST ROLES OF A PRIEST AND A KING IS THAT OF A TEACHER. ARE YOU PREPARING TO BE A TEACHER?**

By Gene Hilgenberg

**W**e in God's Church understand that God has called us to prepare to be kings and priests. And in preparing for that role, we must also prepare to be teachers.

Since one of our responsibilities in God's Kingdom will be to teach, we need to consider what it means to be an effective teacher. By doing so, we can better prepare for our future. In this article, we will consider some of the traits that define a great teacher. I have listed *twelve*, but these are by no means all-inclusive. You will probably be able to think of other traits that a teacher should have.

## **GREAT TEACHERS LOVE TO TEACH**

The *first trait* is that great teachers love what they do. There is no question that great teachers love to teach. They do not dispense knowledge for money, prestige or glory. They teach because it brings them an incredible feeling of satisfaction, knowing that they are contributing positively to the future of others.

Passion has a deep impact, and all great teachers are passionate about their subject. David set us an example of the zeal that we are to have—he constantly meditated on God's testimonies and kept His precepts (Psalm 119:97–100).

David's passion for God's law is the passion that we also should have, because we too will be teaching it to this world when Christ returns. In order to be successful teachers, we need to love God's law, understand it fully and study it deeply, so we will be able to teach it.

I had an old professor who told his students, "*You can't teach what you don't know.*" Now think about that a little bit. It makes a lot of sense. You

need to know God's law to teach it effectively.

Ezra was a teacher at the time that Judah came back from captivity. We read, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in



Israel" (Ezra 7:10). We today ought to be preparing for the day when we will play a role like Ezra's, teaching God's law. And we should look at Ezra's attitude as one we should also have. We are to have a love and a passion for what we do and teach.

## **GREAT TEACHERS ARE GOOD COMMUNICATORS**

The *second trait* is that great teachers are good communicators. Teachers have the responsibility of bridging the gap between themselves and their students, so good communication skills are a must. It is sometimes difficult to relate to people, especially to children, so that they are able to learn a subject. But excellent teachers are masters of this, relating to students on the students' level. These teachers have developed many ways to reach their students, using effective teaching skills, visual aids—and even body language.

People learn in a variety of ways, and great teachers try to address many

of those different ways in their their teaching methods. Likewise, we need to learn to be good communicators of God's truth. It is very important to have fellowship, to learn to speak to and deal with others, especially on the Sabbath day before and after services.

Solomon saw the importance of being able to communicate well. "And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs" (Ecclesiastes 12:9). Not only did Solomon have knowledge; he "set in order" what he knew. Like Solomon, great teachers need to learn how to convey their thoughts in an effective way.

Many proverbs deal with profitable verbal communication. For example, "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer" (Proverbs 15:28). We must be able to give an answer, and if we do not prepare, we will not be able to give that answer. Studying allows us to understand God's word. This is one reason why it is so important that we have a daily study time, when we can immerse ourselves in God's word, so we will be able to have an answer for those who have questions.

Words "fitly spoken" and communication skills are important for a teacher. We need to focus on becoming good communicators (Proverbs 16:21; Proverbs 25:11). If this is a talent you lack, it is something you might want to consider working on—maybe even taking a speech class at a local community college. Good writing skills are another way to communicate. Of course, teachers communicate verbally, for the most part, so we particularly need to learn to speak effectively.

We are commanded, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned

with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:6).

### **GREAT TEACHERS MUST BE ADMIRABLE**

The *third trait* that teachers should have is to be admirable. Great teachers lead lives on a high moral level. This gives them more credibility than others. We are more likely to listen to people we admire, because we hope to be like them someday. Great teachers help show us the way, and they practice what they teach. They set the example.

Keeping God’s laws and His ways, and practicing those things we are taught, will help us become credible teachers in His Kingdom, teaching the world under Christ how to keep God’s laws and His ways. We need to practice now what we will soon teach. If we do so, we will be “lights” (Matthew 5:14).

We will be setting the example for others, just as Christ sets it for us. When we talk about great teachers, the best example is Christ’s perfect example, so we need to emulate Him. He had—and has—all the qualities we should seek to have.

The Apostle Paul stated, “You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery?” (Romans 2:21–22). If we are teaching others, we need to be practicing what we are teaching. Otherwise, no one will have any regard for us at all.

### **GREAT TEACHERS USE POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT**

The *fourth trait* of a great teacher is positive reinforcement. Instead of using strict punishment to discipline students, great teachers know how to use positive reinforcement to discipline. The best teachers often reward their students for doing a good job, so they are more apt to repeat that success in

the future. Great teachers focus on the positive and not on the negative.

Christ did that with us, and many instructions in Scripture tell us what we will be doing in the Millennium. Those who teach in the Millennium will be seen and heard. We read: “But your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:20–21). Notice that the teacher is not saying, “This is not the way.” These verses describe positive reinforcement, going behind the students and guiding their steps, helping them see the right way and encouraging them when they go in it. Of course, when they go the wrong way, there will need to be correction, but even that correction should be positive as much as possible. Effective teaching involves supporting good and right behavior, and an effective teacher strives to provide discipline through positive reinforcement.

### **GREAT TEACHERS ARE FAIR AND JUST**

The *fifth trait* is that great teachers are fair and just. They have mercy.

Teachers teach their students equally, yet give each student the individual attention that he or she needs. Students are not all equal in their ability to take in knowledge and understand it. Teachers need to adjust for that, while remaining fair and just as they deal with their students.

In God’s Kingdom, in the role of king, priest and teacher, today’s firstfruits will be ruling over individuals. When we do so, we must rule justly. We must rule in the fear of God (2 Samuel 23:3). As we prepare for that role today, it is vital that we execute true judgment, walk in God’s statutes and keep His judgments faithfully (Ezekiel 18:5–9). Great teachers set an example by emulating God’s ways and obeying His laws, and in doing so learn to be just and fair in all their dealings.

### **GREAT TEACHERS ARE LEADERS**

The *sixth trait* that we see in a great teacher is leadership. Great teachers are

leaders. In the classroom, they “own” the spotlight. They have the responsibility of being strong instructors so that students listen to them with attention and determination. They have to lead their students on the right path of learning, and inspire them to avoid the obstacles that may stand in the students’ way.

Today’s Christians, as teachers in the Millennium, will be leaders. We will be representing God’s government, under Jesus Christ who will be our King of kings and High Priest—as He is today. And Christ wants us to be developing these traits of a good leader. A true leader directs people’s attention to God and His law. As we read, “his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2). Leaders are to be like trees that stand solid, bringing forth good fruit (v. 3). What is that fruit? Paul describes it this way: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22–23).

Leaders teach by example. By the example we set, we will inspire others to learn. Both today and in God’s Kingdom, God the Father and Jesus Christ are our leaders and instructors who give us counsel. Anciently, King David certainly recognized this when he wrote that the “LORD” gave him counsel (Psalm 16:7). Through Scripture and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, teachers learn how to lead others. We read: “Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law. Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me walk in the paths of Your commandments, for I delight in it” (Psalm 119:33–35). This is the attitude God wants teachers to have. A great teacher leads others by following God the Father and Jesus Christ.

### **GREAT TEACHERS ARE COMMITTED**

The *seventh trait* that we see in great teachers is commitment. Most of us have seen teachers who demonstrate great commitment. They

go above and beyond the minimum time requirements demanded of them, and are willing to give help whenever students need it. Not only are they personally committed to what they teach, they take personal responsibility for helping their students. Likewise, as Christians, we need to be committed to our calling. Do we do the bare minimum, or are we continually striving to grow, to learn more and to do more?

God has chosen each of us, as His firstfruits, to be teachers, so we need to develop that kind of commitment. Do we genuinely want to help people? In order to be an effective teacher, we need to want to help others. And we need to be steadfast in our faith in Christ. We need to be committed to the truth and the understanding God has given us, and we need to remain close to Christ and close to God our Father. We do this through our prayer, study, meditation and occasional fasting. This helps us to remain committed, and even to deepen our commitment. Great teachers are committed to the role that they have been given, committed to their students and committed to their subject.

### **GREAT TEACHERS HAVE UNDERSTANDING**

The *eighth trait* of great teachers is that they have understanding. We will consider two kinds of understanding—understanding the content that we teach, and understanding the students whom we teach.

Of course, as teachers in God's Kingdom, our content is God's laws, precepts and statutes. Are you an expert in God's laws? God has given us this time in our life to become expert in His law of love, and to put into practice His laws and ways. Great teachers are not just experts in their field of knowledge, they are exemplars of what they teach. God will give us the understanding that we need if we learn His commandments and put them into practice in our life (Psalm 111:10).

One ongoing lesson we all learn is the lesson of human behavior, and

how to deal with other people. It is important that we learn how to guide others in proper behavior, because this will be our role in God's Kingdom. In order to do this, great teachers not only understand what they teach, they understand those they are teaching. Great teachers understand where their students came from, who they are, and how best to help them grow into who they can become.



It is through God's word that we are given understanding (Proverbs 9:10). So, how do we gain understanding of God's word? Through Bible study, and through faithful attendance at Sabbath services, where we learn from God's ministers. By being diligent students, we develop the understanding that will make us effective teachers.

We can basically consider our lives today as a "college." God is using our lives today to prepare us as teachers in His Kingdom. He gives us trials to help us learn, to correct us and to motivate us. The Apostle Peter said that we should look upon our trials with joy, because these are opportunities to learn—opportunities to become more like Christ by developing His very character (1 Peter 4:12–13).

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13). How does God judge us? He judges us by our works and by the effort that we exert.

### **GREAT TEACHERS HAVE COMPASSION AND CARING**

*Trait number nine* is that great teachers are compassionate and caring. A great teacher recognizes that there is much suffering in this world, and has the inner desire to help. Great teachers know that, by giving knowledge to the next generation, they are helping to develop individuals who will have the skills, compassion and dedication to help end suffering.

Great teachers hope to nurture and protect their students much as shepherds do their flocks. Shepherds have compassion and care for their sheep. Those of us who have had experience on a farm know that lambs can be very loving and sweet. Shepherds know there are some dangers the sheep cannot handle on their own. It is the shepherd's responsibility to care for them and protect them so that they can grow. This is how Jesus Christ looks upon us. He guards and feeds His flock as a compassionate Shepherd (Isaiah 40:11). He has care and compassion for all humanity (Isaiah 63:7–9). He feels our pain. He personally understands what we go through, and He can relate this to God our Father, to tell Him exactly what our suffering is about. Christ bears us and carries us, and if we go to Him in faith He will relieve us from our pain and from our suffering (v. 9).

Indeed, Christ is the Master Teacher. Notice this description of His care for us: "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest'" (Matthew 9:36–38).

We, today, are those laborers and harvesters. God has called us today not only to prepare to become teachers in His Kingdom, but to labor and help those He is calling at this present time.

## GREAT TEACHERS HAVE CONFIDENCE

*Trait number ten* of great teachers is confidence. A teacher cannot teach without it. Students will not believe in teachers who do not first believe in themselves. Great teachers are confident that they know how to teach and in what they are teaching.

How do teachers become confident? They know their subject. They know they are able to communicate and express themselves. They love what they are doing, and they care about doing it well.

God's Spirit gives us confidence. As Christians, we are to have boldness through the faith that is given to us. It is through faith that we have confidence. We are certain that what Christ has told us is true. We know that Jesus Christ will come back to this earth very soon. He will establish His government, and we know He is going to use us in His government to help teach this world. We are sure of it—and that confidence comes from His Holy Spirit. Through the faith that is given to us, we receive it (Ephesians 3:12).

God tells us that He will give us the power that is necessary to overcome—and that He will give us the ability to succeed and to be in His Kingdom—if we ask. Why? He will do so “because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22). We can be confident in this promise.

## GREAT TEACHERS ARE PREPARED

The *eleventh trait* is that great teachers are prepared. They know the necessary steps in presenting material to their students, and they follow those steps well. They know what they are teaching. Great teachers are expected to know their subject matter, just as God expects us to know and practice His law and His way and understand His word. Great teachers never leave their students lost and not knowing the direction in which they are heading. They stick to the plans they prepare in order to teach the best way possible.

Another aspect of preparation is learning. Teachers are life-long learners. Are you constantly studying and preparing to be a king and a priest? Aquilla and Priscilla met an individual who wanted to teach (Acts 18:24–26). He was willing to learn and to study, and when he came into new understanding, he applied it. He did not think that he knew everything and could not be taught. We do not know everything.

Even God continues to learn. He learns about us. For example, He did not know about Abraham's character for sure, until He gave him some trials to see how



faithful he would be. Remember what God said when Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac? After He held Abraham's hand away from completing the sacrifice, only then did He know the depth of Abraham's fear of God (Genesis 22:12). God is testing us all the time, too. He wants to see how we are going to react to certain situations. Eventually, as with Abraham, He will give each of us a trial and test, and upon seeing our proper reaction, He will be able to say about us: “Now I know.”

Timothy was taught the Holy Scriptures from childhood. “From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14–17).

Are we as well prepared as Timothy? Are we equipped for every good work? Are we becoming complete? Great teachers are.

## GREAT TEACHERS ARE PROFESSIONAL

A *twelfth trait* of great teachers is professionalism. Another word that you could use for professionalism is character. Good character is the mark of a great teacher. Teachers know that, as people who are responsible for helping other people learn, they must take their work seriously. This means that they rarely if ever miss days they are assigned to work. They take seriously their responsibility to show up on time and put in a full day's work. They present themselves professionally to their students, dressing appropriately, grooming themselves nicely and practicing good hygiene. They treat their students with respect, and conduct themselves in a professional manner that earns their students' respect. This creates an environment most conducive to learning.

God is developing His very character within us. We are to develop His mind, so that we will become one with Him and learn to think as He thinks. Then, all of our actions will reflect the thoughts of Jesus Christ who dwells in us through His Holy Spirit, and everything that we do will be a reflection of Jesus Christ. Scripture teaches us to “live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you” (Titus 2:12–15).

There are many qualities that make a teacher great. The twelve we have covered here are just a few of the most important. Many of us can look back on a few great teachers who shaped our life and our character. By emulating Christ, the Master Teacher, we are developing His holy and righteous character in our own lives, in preparation for our roles in His Kingdom and for all eternity. ■

# Strength Through Weakness

By Paul Shumway

Many of God's people are going through severe trials right now. Some have just come out of a difficult trial, and others may be about to enter a time of great challenges. How can we handle our trials?

**W**e are living in the last days—a time in which Christ said, “because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will wax cold.” On another occasion, He posed the question, “when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”—indicating just how challenging times will be (Matthew 24:12; Luke 18:8).

How do you face these extremely difficult times? What approach do you take? What is your attitude when severe trials hit you?

Consider the example of the Apostle Paul. He was struck time after time with the most challenging trials, perhaps more than anyone else we read about in Scripture except for Jesus Christ. Yet, Paul never blamed God. He always had a positive attitude. He never felt sorry for himself, and he never stopped trusting God.

How did he do it? What was his secret?

## THE APOSTLE PAUL'S CONVERSION

Saul of Tarsus was about to learn a very important lesson on the road to Damascus. He had set out on a journey with one purpose in mind. “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest” (Acts 9:1). This was very soon after Saul had been present at the stoning of Stephen, cheering on those who were murdering God's faithful servant. Saul asked for letters from the high priest to take to the synagogues of Damascus, in case he found any there who were “of the Way.”

Any Christians Saul found, men or women, he planned to bring back bound to Jerusalem. But then, something dramatic happened. “As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’” (Acts 9:3–4).

This must have been an intense light. We can picture it actually knocking Saul to the ground, like a bolt of lightning. This was something very profound and very powerful. Here

is this man, Saul, who feared no one, and all of a sudden he was knocked very low. “And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’” Imagine how Saul must have felt. He thought he had been doing God a service, but then the One he was persecuting said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (v. 5). Notice Saul's repentant and teachable attitude. Trembling and astonished, he replied, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” (v. 6). The Lord then gave an instruction, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do’... Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one” (vv. 6–8).

What a shock! Saul was blind. When this happened, he did not know his blindness would last for just three days; it could have been for the rest of his life! “But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus” (v. 8). How humbling to be led around, not able to see. “And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank” (v. 9). Soon afterward, another dramatic change occurred. God's Spirit entered him, and the man who became Paul was humbled. He began to see his weaknesses for the first time (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

**CONSIDER THE EXAMPLE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL. HE WAS HIT TIME AFTER TIME WITH DIFFICULT TRIALS, PERHAPS MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE WE READ ABOUT IN SCRIPTURE EXCEPT FOR JESUS CHRIST. YET, PAUL NEVER BLAMED GOD. HE ALWAYS HAD A POSITIVE ATTITUDE. HE NEVER FELT SORRY FOR HIMSELF. HE NEVER STOPPED TRUSTING GOD.**

## STRENGTH MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS

Paul learned a very important lesson, documented in 2 Corinthians 12, which helped him deal with life's most difficult problems in a positive way. As with Paul, God's strength can be perfected in us only when we are truly weak—and acknowledge our weakness. Consider the parallel with building stronger muscles. When we exercise, we actually break our muscles down. They become weaker, for a while, but our body rebuilds them in such a way that they become even stronger than before.

Something similar happens when we grow spiritually. When we recognize our weakness, God is able to give us His strength. This is how we can benefit from trials. So, do you rejoice in your weaknesses rather than in your strengths and accomplishments? If you are like most of us, the answer

is probably: “Not very often!” Yet Christ showed Paul that we must do exactly that, and Paul made it a part of his very being. He did not doubt God’s wisdom. As Isaiah reminds us, “For 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).

### THE APOSTLE PAUL’S SUFFERING

Paul said there were things he wanted to do that he did not do, and that he did other things that he did not want to do (Romans 7:15–20). He also suffered from challenges by Church members who were disparaging him, and making inroads with other Church members in putting him down. “Why, he couldn’t possibly be an apostle! Just look at all the trials he is going through! And has he ever seen any visions? He’s an impudent impostor!”

Faced with these charges, but commanded by God to minister, Paul had to address some of these attacks. “Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I will also boast” (2 Corinthians 11:18). What did Paul say to defend himself? “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one” (2 Corinthians 11:22–24, *KJV*).

While some of his critics had been able to hide in the shadows, Paul had five times endured the prescribed whipping. This was a horrible punishment, so brutal that it sometimes killed the one receiving it. It was so severe that the authorities were careful not to over-count, and although the prescribed number of lashes was 40, they stopped at 39 to be sure not to exceed what was allowed.

“Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Corinthians 11:25–27).

How times had changed! Paul had spent years of his life persecuting the Church of God, those of the *Way*, but now he was a Christian and the very same people of Damascus whom he had sought to imprison and even to kill, would hide him in a fish basket and let him out through a window to save his life! (2 Corinthians 11:32–33).

### PAUL’S VISIONS AND REVELATIONS

How did Paul respond to the charge that he, unlike some other early Christian leaders, had not had visions? We know that he had a number of visions, but he only chose to describe

one. He said, “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:1–2).

Paul found this experience astounding. “Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth” (vv. 5–6). This vision was so vivid that he could scarcely distinguish it from actually being at the foot of God’s throne; it was absolutely incredible. “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure” (v. 7).

This “thorn in the flesh” troubled Paul so greatly that on three occasions he begged Christ to remove it. And what was Christ’s response? “Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn’t get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan’s angel did his best to get me down; what in fact he did was push me to my knees. No danger of walking around high and mighty! At first I didn’t think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times, I did that and then He told me, ‘My grace is enough. It’s all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.’ Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ’s strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become” (2 Corinthians 12:7–10, *The Message*).

What an inspiring attitude!

### THE APOSTLE PETER’S WEAKNESS

The Apostle Peter was bold, and he was not afraid to speak out. He was human, and we really can identify with his humanness. His example is very relevant for us today.

Christ warned, before His crucifixion, that all of His disciples would stumble. Peter, however, bragged to Christ that even if all the others were made to stumble, he would not (Mark 14:27–31).

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had foretold that, before the rooster crowed twice on the night of Christ’s arrest, Peter would deny his Savior three times. But Peter thought he was very strong, so he boasted to Christ that he would never do such a thing. No doubt, in his mind, Peter had sincerely committed himself to being firm, to standing up for his friend and Savior (Mark 14:31). But Peter’s strength quickly gave way as the stressful events of that night went on.

Christ was brought to the high priest's house, and Peter followed Him. Peter was so bold as to follow Christ right there to watch what was happening. "Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came. And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus of Nazareth.' But he denied it, saying, 'I neither know nor understand what you are saying.' And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed" (Mark 14:66–68).

Peter denied Christ a second time, and then a third time. Again Peter heard the crow of a rooster. Then he remembered Christ's words. Christ turned and looked at Peter, and their eyes met. Picture Peter looking "eyeball to eyeball" with his Savior, whom he had just denied, despite all his bragging to the contrary. Peter then went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:54–62).

Would we say that Peter was very strong at this point? Or was he very weak? Clearly, Christ had exposed his great weakness.

Of course, we know that God's Spirit came upon Peter not too many days after these events, and a different man emerged on the day of Pentecost. Yes, God's Spirit was present, but something else had taken place. Peter saw himself in a way he had not seen himself before.

Once Peter had become truly weak—had been able to put aside his former high estimation of himself—God could begin to pour out His strength on him, and Peter became a mighty defender of the faith. He was dynamic—a great speaker, a powerful servant of God and a wonderful apostle who later laid down his life for Christ.

Again we see the importance of Christ's words to Paul, "for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

### IN MY OWN LIFE

A number of years ago, after resigning from my position as a pastor with the Worldwide Church of God, I went looking for a job. I looked and looked, but nothing turned up. Times were tough. I contacted a number of employment agencies. The director at one of them told me, "You know, you have a lot of good skills, Mr. Shumway, but I don't know of any corporations looking for ex-ministers." Not very encouraging!

Finally, three positions opened up at the same time—a part-time teaching job, a sales manager job and a job coaching Junior High School baseball. My heart wanted to accept the teaching and coaching positions, but the salaries would not support our family, so I turned them down in favor of the sales management job, which promised a considerably higher earning potential.

After the first day in that "management" position—which involved selling door to door—I was asking myself, "What in the world did I get myself into?" But without another job to go to, and with the promise of a better future, I decided to stick it out. So, for the first week, I did what the regional manager said. I made more calls than just about anybody else in the office. But not one sale. My manager said, "Oh, Paul, you're doing great. Keep it up and things will break!" But the next week? The same. I was putting in long hours. But not one sale. And I was on straight commission!

I found myself praying with unusual intensity. For days and even weeks, my Bible study was 2 Timothy 1:6–7. I would get down on my knees and read those verses to God. Then, after a while, I added another set of verses to my prayers. I was going over Philippians 4:6 again and again, talking to God over and over. I desperately wanted God to bless my efforts.

The third week went by, without a sale. The fourth week came and went. My human frailty was staring coldly in my face. I came to the point of asking, "God, where are You?" I began see my weakness more clearly than ever before.

That was it. Once I had really recognized my weakness, things began to turn around. I won some contests and was promoted to assistant manager. After a while, I was offered the branch managership.

At that point, I realized that I did not want to do that job for the long term, so I resigned. I moved into retail sales, and took a night job working for the United States Postal Service. During the week I had two full-time jobs, eight hours each day and eight hours at night.

Until then, I had never realized that you can fall asleep standing up. I was sorting mail at night, and all of a sudden I just started to fall, but I caught myself before I hit the floor. I sheepishly looked around to see if any supervisor saw me. Thankfully, I did not see anybody. After a while, my knees would just buckle. I would start to go straight down, but I would catch myself. I never hit the floor, but I would fall asleep standing up while sorting mail!

This was really a very, very difficult time for me. It went on for three years. On the Sabbath, we were driving more than a hundred miles to services, so I was thankful that my wife would drive, and I could sleep. When I was hired by the Global Church of God, that was one of the happiest days of my life. The previous three years had been absolute misery. But, in retrospect, I am glad that I went through those difficult times. I would not choose to do so again, ever, but I can honestly say I am thankful for those three years, as they let God do something to this hard-headed Israelite in a special way that I really appreciate.

How? Because I could see His strength working in my weakness. For this, I thank God very much. We all have trials,



difficulties and hardships. “We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance” (Romans 5:3). Perseverance then builds character, as we endure in our trials.

### PERSEVERANCE BUILDS CHARACTER

Many long-time members of God’s Church will remember how Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong often said that there is one thing God cannot supernaturally create by fiat: holy, righteous character.

Indeed, character is something in which we each must grow. Character is choosing the right thing when we are being told to do the wrong thing. It is not always a case of, “This is no contest; this is the one way to go and it is easy to go.” Sometimes, you know deep down the way you should go, but the other way seems easier, or more fun, or it may be the way your friends are encouraging you to go. “My friends are doing it, and they seem to be doing OK, and I don’t see any bad results, at least not yet. Maybe I should?”

But, if we are building character, we will say, “No, I won’t take the easy way out. I’m doing the right thing, because God says so.” The more we practice that, we grow, and our trials and tribulations produce perseverance, which leads to the building of holy, righteous, perfect character. Another aspect is that as we grow in character, we grow in hope. As we go through trials, not only do we build perseverance, we gain a greater hope, which in turn increases our perseverance and our growth.

We do not always understand God’s ways. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8). But we can have hope and trust in God, even when He asks a lot from us. We are instructed, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (James 1:2). This does not mean to “bury your head in the sand” and pretend that a trial is some kind of blessing. We need to be realistic. And when we face reality, we come to understand that each trial is an opportunity to learn. We can learn to say, when a trial comes, “Thank you God. I’m looking forward to seeing how you get me out of this one, because it looks impossible.”

If a trial seems hard, we may boldly think we can overcome it on our own. But if it seems impossible, we know that in our weakness we have nowhere else to turn but to God. As we grow, as we go through trials and learn to look to God, we can be confident that He will bring us through. “Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:3–4).

God loves us so much that He wants us to become like Him. He wants us to have His character, so He allows us to go through times of difficulty. He knows how much it hurts, but

He also knows how much it will do for us and help us grow. So, we can learn and grow from even the most difficult trials. And when we are dealing with them, we should especially pray for wisdom (James 1:5).

### HOW TO FACE TRIALS

I thank our Heavenly Father that I am learning to face difficult trials with a sense of joy, even though they can be so painful at the time. This has been slow in coming, I admit. Some of you reading this article are going through some very difficult trials right now, and my heart goes out to you. You know that God’s heart does, too. And you can be sure that He is working something out in your life—something very profound, something very powerful. Never forget Christ’s riveting words, “My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

As we come to see how weak we truly are, God is able to show us how strong He is. Not just how strong He is in doing so many great miracles to sustain the vast universe, but how He is working powerfully and dynamically in your own life. It is a wonderful thing to experience.

In all of this, we must not neglect the importance of fasting. By fasting, we voluntarily choose to make ourselves weak. When we fast regularly, God can demonstrate His strength in us more readily, which in turn makes us stronger. Peter tells us, “‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5–6). When we have this intimate contact with God, it is a wonderful experience.



### CHRIST’S EXAMPLE

Jesus Christ said that He could “do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19). What the Son does sets the pattern for us to do. We can be like Him. Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). Paul could do this, because Christ lived His life in him, helping him set for us a tremendous example. And, if we follow that example, Christ will live His life in each of us.

God did not call us because of our great strength. Rather, He calls the weak of the world. But, as we acknowledge our weakness, God can pour out His strength on us. Then we can truly become strong, because that strength is not our own—it is God’s—through Christ living His life in us.

Knowing this, we can learn to rejoice in our trials. We can thank God for them, for what they are accomplishing in us. We can thank Him for what He is doing in us, as His strength is made perfect in our weakness. ■



# MORE BLESSED TO GIVE

By Bob G. League

**D**uring his final missionary journey, the Apostle Paul spent some time in the Greek town of Miletus. From there, he called for the elders of the Ephesian congregation to come to Miletus to meet with him. When they had come, he discussed some very serious and important issues with them (Acts 20:17–19, 29–30).

Toward the end of his discourse, Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he had always provided for his own needs, as well as for the needs of others. He exhorted the Ephesians to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, who said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (v. 35).

As Christians, we hear this statement often, and we may even take it for granted. But, have we ever asked ourselves the question, “Why is it more blessed to give than to receive?”

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong taught that there are two basic philosophies of life. To put them into simple terms, he called them the “give way” and the “get way.” Today’s world is based on the satanic principles of greed, lust, selfishness and vanity—the “get way.”

From the beginning, human society was faced with a choice between these opposing ways, represented by the two trees in the Garden of Eden. We read: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:7–9).

God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it (v. 15).

Had Adam and Eve followed God’s instruction—had they not partaken of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—the Garden of Eden would have

continued to serve their needs, and they would not have become subject to death (Genesis 2:16–17). They would have been blessed beyond measure if they had chosen obedience to God’s way of life. Instead, since they did not heed God’s warning, the satanic way of “get” entered the scene for mankind. Human beings



have struggled ever since, and human society has not learned the lesson that the way of disobedience to God and His law leads only to a life of misery and death.

Human beings have chosen the “get way.” Yet, for those who practice it, the “give way” is more blessed—Jesus Christ said so! Why? Here are three simple and concrete reasons that profoundly illustrate the truth of Christ’s teaching.

## REASON #1: GIVING BRINGS INNER JOY

God Himself is the supreme example of joyful giving. He is the greatest giver of all. God the Father gave us His Son. He gives us His Spirit and His truth. He gives us understanding. He answers our prayers, and gives us encouragement. Christ gave His very life (Hebrews 12:1–3).

God’s very nature is giving. What else does Scripture reveal about His nature? We read, “You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). God is not a reluctant or somber giver; He is full of joy.

Even in sacrifice, Christ knew joy would result. “Therefore we also, since

we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Christ’s sacrifice was indescribably painful. Along with the physical torture He experienced, He endured for the first time ever a total separation from God the Father. Yet, despite the pain, He could see the joy ahead—the joy of a large and happy God Family with many members—that His sacrifice would make possible. So, He was able to count His suffering as joy.

The Apostle Paul elaborates on this principle by which the joy of giving puts our suffering into proper perspective: “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:1–5).

Paul emphasizes that the Macedonian brethren had first given themselves to the Lord. Indeed, to receive God’s gifts fully, we must give ourselves to Him in love and in obedience. Psalm 103 lists the benefits He gives to those who obey Him. He is kind to all mankind, and His ways of giving cannot ever be numbered.

Scripture reminds us: “He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor” (Proverbs 22:9). The key to real joy is to

give ourselves first to God, then to the people around us. We see this principle in action in the gospel account of Christ feeding the multitude (five thousand men, plus their families) who were listening to Him. The apostles did not give the bread and fish directly to the poor. First, they gave the loaves and fishes to Christ, then Christ gave back to the apostles more than enough to feed the multitude (Luke 9:11–17).

### **REASON #2: GIVING HELPS THOSE IN NEED**

Jesus Christ preached the Gospel—the “good news”—of the coming Kingdom of God. He healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind and fed the multitudes. He was never too tired to give of Himself to others. The Apostle Paul wrote to the brethren in Galatia, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

How can we, as members of the “household of faith,” help one another? In addition to our tithes and offerings, we can pray fervently that God will bless the Work of the Church. We can pray specifically that God will add new laborers to the harvest (Matthew 9:38). We can pray for the inspiration and success of the *Tomorrow’s World* telecast, the preaching of the Gospel via the Internet, the various print publications, Living University and each of the many congregations around the globe. As we are able, we can also give of our time in serving one another, not only in our congregations but where we know of brethren in need. Consider how you have been blessed, and how Christ asked of us: “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8).

Consider the principle of the “Good Samaritan.” When a lawyer came asking the question “Who is my neighbor?” Christ related a story. A man, attacked by thieves, was stripped of his clothing and left half-dead at the roadside. A priest and a Levite each passed by, choosing not to help the man in distress. Were they in too much of a hurry? Or did they simply

lack a caring and giving nature? Finally, a Samaritan came by. This Samaritan—a man the priest and the Levite would have looked down on and despised—bandaged the injured man’s wounds and paid to have him nursed back to health.

A true neighbor is one who goes the extra mile to help. Christ told the lawyer to go and do likewise (Luke 10:29–37).

### **REASON #3: GREAT REWARDS AND DIVIDENDS**

Here is a wonderful paradox: the more we give, the more we receive! “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38).

Giving does not go unrewarded. Paul encouraged the Ephesian brethren to give, “knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free” (Ephesians 6:8). Paul further explained, “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Hebrews 6:10).

Abraham was willing to give his very son when God told him to take Isaac to the land of Moriah and sacrifice him there. God did not actually want Isaac to be sacrificed; He was testing Abraham, and Abraham passed the test, obeying God without any doubt (Genesis 22:1–10). Abraham knew that Isaac was the promised seed, and that God cannot lie (Hebrews 11:17–19), so he had complete faith that God would not take his son from him.

Indeed, as Abraham was about to slay Isaac, the Angel of the Lord intervened and stopped the sacrifice. Speaking for God, the Angel said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son” (Genesis 22:12). Abraham had shown his willingness to give his

son, and was given an amazing blessing in return, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (v. 18). Put simply, Abraham had qualified to become the father of many nations, and the father of the faithful.

A time is yet coming when Christ will gather all the nations to Him (Matthew 25:31–33). He will set the sheep at His right hand, and the goats at His left hand. The sheep are the givers, to whom God will give His Kingdom. Christ will say to them, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me” (vv. 34–36).

Then the righteous will answer Him: “Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?” (vv. 37–39). What will be Christ’s answer? “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (v. 40).

A sadder outcome awaits the goats—the “getters”—who will receive the reward of their selfishness. They will not inherit eternal life, but rather will go away into everlasting punishment, while the righteous enter into eternal life (v. 46).

God promises, “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be His God and he shall be My son” (Revelation 21:7). He also says, “behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Revelation 22:12).

Are our works the works of “give” or of “get”? It is up to each of us individually. What a joy it will be to hear Jesus welcome each overcomer to “Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matthew 25:21–23). So, let us remember the words of Jesus, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” ■

# No TURNING BACK!

When Jesus Christ was on trial for His life, He was asked a momentous question: “Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, ‘Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ Jesus said, ‘I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven’” (Mark 14:61–62).

If we were to be put on trial for our faith, could we answer our accusers with the unequivocal confidence Christ showed? Or, would we stumble, much as the Apostle Peter did when he was questioned about his relationship with Jesus: “And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, ‘This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ But again he [Peter] denied with an oath, ‘I do not know the Man’” (Matthew 26:71–72).

We in God’s Church understand that, as the present age of Satan’s rule over humanity comes to an end, perilous times will come that test the followers of Jesus Christ. Many will be persecuted for their belief in—and obedience to—the word of God, and for their support of the Work of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to a world that does not want to hear the message.

Jesus Christ, the King of kings, told His followers to expect difficult times ahead for those who strive to worship God in Spirit and in truth. “But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Mark 13:9–13).

Certainly, the times to come may be difficult. But we cannot “un-know” what we know. Those of us who have responded sincerely to God’s call, through repentance and baptism, will gain nothing by slackening our former commitment. Yes, drawing back in a time of persecution may bring a temporary respite, but in the long run such cowardice will result in spiritual shipwreck! “This is a faithful saying: ‘For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He

also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:11–13).

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy regarding two brethren who fell away and thus forfeited God’s protection. “This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Timothy 1:18–20).

It is no small matter to renege on the commitment we made at baptism. Jesus Christ personally warned of the dangers of failing to follow through on our calling. As Jesus warned, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

We need to take Christ’s words seriously. Once we have responded to the Father’s calling and accepted the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our past sins, we dare not go back to Satan’s world and again partake of those things that separated us from God. “As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly” (Proverbs 26:11).

Even so, Jesus knew that most who heard His message would be unable or unwilling to follow through. He spoke the following parable to explain: “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and

it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold’ When He had said these things He cried, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’” (Luke 8:5–8).

Christ went on to explain that the seed that fell on rock represents those who first hear the Truth with joy, but who—having no root—fall away when they experience temptation or persecution (v. 13). Are we rooted in our faith, or are we at risk of falling away when times grow tough?

In another parable, Christ described a king who had difficulty in finding guests willing to attend his son’s wedding feast. Most of those invited were too busy with their worldly pursuits, so the king sent his servants to roam the highways in search of others who might attend. This filled the wedding hall, but when the king saw one guest

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without a wedding garment, he banished him into “outer darkness.” The meaning of the parable? Christ reminds us of the sobering truth that “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14).

Scripture tells us that those who are raised in the first resurrection are “blessed” and “holy” (Revelation 20:6). It does **not** promise that the path to this resurrection will be an easy one. We see how many people find that the challenges, trials and tests of life in this present age are too difficult to overcome. Besides, there are so many lusts and temptations of the world to experience. “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13–14).

What will happen, then, to those who once found that gate, but who then turn away from it? What awaits those who not only learned the Truth of God, but who acted on it—repented, accepted baptism and received the Holy Spirit—but who then decided that they had better things to do with their lives? Here is how the Apostle Paul describes their sad end: “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:4–6).

Having rejected the gift of the Holy Spirit, and spurned Christ’s sacrifice, such individuals are without hope of salvation: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

### WITH GOD, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE!

At first glance, the above parables may make the task of enduring to the end seem overwhelming and even discouraging. “After all,” you may think, “so many others have fallen away—what makes me think that I am any better, or any stronger, or any more converted than they were?”

Thankfully, we know that with God’s help, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). And we know that we do not need to rely on our own strength alone. Without our acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice, and without the Holy Spirit in us, we lack the power to overcome self, society and Satan. Yet, with God’s power in us, we can have confidence, knowing that we can prevail and enter into the Kingdom of God, “strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light” (Colossians 1:11–12).

Filled with God’s Spirit, confident of our future inheritance, we can endure all manner of persecution. Consider the example of Stephen, one of the first deacons in the Jerusalem congregation of the Church of God. Stephen was fearless in his zeal for the Truth, and firm in faith toward the Father and Jesus Christ. When dragged before the Jewish religious authorities, he bravely articulated his belief, preaching the word of God with power and authority. Stephen was not alone as he faced his accusers; Christ guided Stephen’s mind as he proclaimed the Truth to the very individuals who had not long before orchestrated the execution of the Son of God! And even in the face of certain death, God did not leave Stephen devoid of hope and encouragement; He gave this brave martyr a special vision to embolden and sustain him. “When they [the Sanhedrin] heard these things they were

cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’” (Acts 7:54–56)!

Many, perhaps most, in the Living Church of God will be able to live and die without experiencing such a dramatic trial. Staying close to God the Father, developing a close and

loving relationship with our Master, Jesus Christ, whom we strive to obey, we may find that our greatest trials are the ones we bring on ourselves through weakness and carelessness. Yet, we know that God will always be there to protect and guide us. “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. Behold, all those who were incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced; they shall be as nothing, and those who strive with you shall perish... For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you!’” (Isaiah 41:10–11, 13).

Are we keeping ourselves close to God, so that we know we will be under His protection? Are we remaining faithful in regular prayer, Bible study, meditation and occasional fasting? If we are, we can have confidence that God will give us what we need to endure through trials, and to overcome, so that we may become the “firstfruits” who will rule under Jesus Christ in tomorrow’s world. And how does God describe our reward? “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name” (Revelation 3:12).

For we who have accepted God’s calling, there is no turning back. Let us all remain determined to stay close to our Savior, that we may receive the reward He has planned for us.

—LCG Editorial Staff



## Make the Most of Preparation Day

Continued from page 8

for mercy. Too many people use Christ's comment about the "ox in a ditch" as an excuse for doing more or less anything they want to do on the Sabbath. And that is clearly not what Christ meant!

Moreover, as best you can, **watch out for ditches and keep your oxen away from them!** That is to say, try to anticipate problems and stop them in advance—during the work week—before they invade your Sabbath. Preparation is the key!

Another important principle is to *orient your family toward the Sabbath*. If you have children, you may want to plan activities for them for Friday evening and for the time before or after Church services. The Sabbath should not be a day of restriction and boredom for young people—it should be a treat. It should be a time when Mom and Dad are readily available.

No discussion of preparing for the Sabbath would be complete without mentioning the importance of coordinating work hours. For men and women who work outside the home, it is important to arrange for job hours

to be finished as long before Friday sunset as possible. For some, this may be difficult—especially in the winter when the sun sets earlier. But to the extent you are able to provide yourself some extra time, you can reduce the number and the severity of "carrier landings" as your Sabbath begins,

**HUSBANDS, REMEMBER THAT YOUR ROLE AS HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD IS A POSITION OF SERVICE TO YOUR FAMILY. ASSIST YOUR WIFE IN MAKING THE WHOLE FAMILY'S SABBATH AS ENJOYABLE AS POSSIBLE. PROVIDE LEADERSHIP IN PLANNING TO MAKE THE SABBATH A DELIGHT.**

which can reduce the stress caused by various last-minute contingencies. Problems sometimes crop up, so "expect the unexpected" before the Sabbath, and—if at all possible—leave a little extra time for dealing with minor emergencies.

Husbands, remember that your role as head of the household is a position of service to your family. Assist your wife in making the whole family's Sabbath as enjoyable as possible. Provide leadership in planning to make the Sabbath a delight.

Finally, consider this small but vital detail: when you say the blessing for your Friday evening meal, do not forget to ask for God's rest, joy and peace to come upon your household. God will give those things if you set your heart to properly observe His holy time.

The Sabbath is a great blessing that God has given His people. God tells us so, in the text of the Fourth Commandment. But in order to make the most of that blessing—to make the Sabbath's holiness the delight God intends it to be—we need to plan in advance so we can cease fully from our customary activity, and engage in activities set apart for the holy day. To help us do this, God has given us the Preparation Day. He has shown us the importance of preparation. If we use wisely the day He has given us, we can more effectively keep our lives oriented toward preparing for the soon-coming Kingdom of God. ■

## Do You Thank God for Christ's Sacrifice?

Continued from page 2

Remember brethren, we **all** still sin! "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, *and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). The Bible tells us to **repent** (Acts 2:36–38) and to **confess** our sins. As the Apostle John tells us, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we *confess* our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8–9).

How many of **us** get down on our knees regularly and pray to God, "Father, *forgive me the sinner*. Please apply the shed blood of Your Son to me. Through Your Spirit, please help me really *overcome* my own selfishness, vanity, lust and greed. Help me to overcome my 'hurt feelings' and attitudes of resentment against my brethren. Please clean me up and scrub me out and help me to *reflect Jesus Christ* far more in **everything** I think, say and do!"

This is the attitude of a *true* Christian! To be true Christians, we must genuinely *appreciate* and love Jesus

Christ our Savior. We must be *pleased* to be Christians—called by *His name*. We must always be aware that we are the followers of *Jesus Christ of Nazareth*. We must *worship* Him and *adore* Him and want to "walk" with Christ—and with the Father—now and forever.

Brethren, if we **all** learn to pray like this—and *really mean it*—then God's Holy Spirit will be increasingly poured out upon us more than ever. The **power** of God will energize the Work of His Church more than ever. Then, we will not fall victim to the easygoing, self-sufficient lukewarm attitude of the Laodiceans. And each of us can build a deep, heartfelt relationship of love, thankfulness and trust in God *through Jesus Christ our Savior and High Priest*. For Christ truly is our wonderful Savior, High Priest and living Head.

*Roderick Meredith*

# LOCAL

## CHURCH NEWS

### ANNIVERSARIES

*Mr. and Mrs. Ron (Jean) Peterson*, of the Tampa, Florida, congregation celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on June 18. Mr. and Mrs. Peterson were both baptized into God's Church in 1965 and have long been active in the Church. Mr. Peterson served as a deacon for many years and was ordained an Elder in 1996. Mrs. Peterson assisted him in his business and was supportive of his service in the Church, including music. The Petersons have seven

children: Rhonda Clore of Fairfax, Virginia; Robin Morelli of Lakeland, Florida; Reg Peterson of Miami, Florida; Rick Peterson of Big Sandy, Texas; Teresa Westwood of Chandler, Texas; Brenda Wendling of Bluffton, Indiana; and Jeff Peterson of Lakeland, Florida. They also have 16 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

*Mr. and Mrs. Vance (Wanda) West*, of the Houston, Texas congregation,

celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on August 1. They were baptized more than 40 years ago and have served God's people as deacon and deaconess for many years. The Houston congregation honored Mr. and Mrs. West with a gift, cake and refreshments in celebration of their anniversary. Mr. and Mrs. West have set a fine example of leadership and commitment to God and His way of life, and their example in marriage is an inspiration to many.

### Births

Mr. and Mrs. Craig (Debbie) Hill of the Perth, Australia congregation are delighted to announce the birth of *Sarah Emily Hill* on January 21. She weighed 8 pounds, 14 ounces and was 22 inches long. Big sister Rebekah is thrilled with her new playmate!

Mr. and Mrs. Steve (Melissa) Farris of the Baton Rouge, Louisiana congregation are happy to announce the birth of their baby daughter, *Lillian Grace Farris*. She was born on June 20, weighing 7 pounds, 3 ounces and was 20 inches long. She was welcomed home by big brother Gabe.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard (Gretchen) Jacques announce the birth of their second son, *Aaron Timothy Jacques*, born Monday, August 8. Aaron weighed 8 pounds, 5 ounces and measured 22½ inches long. Big brother Jonathan helped his excited family welcome Aaron home.

Richard and Jessica Olson of Kansas City, Missouri, are very pleased to announce the birth of their first child, *Axel Evan Olson*, on May 26, weighing 6 pounds 11 ounces, and measuring 18¾ inches long. Evan is Timothy and Bonnie Todd's first grandchild and Theresa Harden's third. They are all very excited about this new addition!

### Ordinations

*Mr. Lawdi Ferreira* was ordained an elder on February 19 by Regional Pastor Rod King. Mr. Ferreira serves in the Pretoria, South Africa congregation.

*Mr. Clayton Oswald* was ordained a deacon on May 14 by Regional Pastor Rand Millich and elder Bill Oswald. Mr. Oswald serves the brethren in the Columbia, Missouri, congregation.

*Mr. Gerald Demery* was ordained a deacon on May 14 by Regional Pastor Rand Millich and elder Bill Oswald. Mr. Demery serves the brethren in the St. Louis, Missouri, congregation.

*Mrs. Louise Hay* was ordained a deaconess on the Day of Pentecost by Area Pastor Michael Elertson. Mrs. Hay serves the brethren in the Regina, Saskatchewan, congregation.



BRETHREN POSE FOR A PHOTO DURING MR. GRAEME HEMPHILL'S VISIT TO MAPRIK, PAPUA NEW GUINEA, IN MARCH 2011

## In Loving Memory

**Mr. Walden Ronald Lee** of the Lansing, Michigan congregation, died November 19, 2010, at the age of 75 years. He is survived by his three sons, Ronald D. (Diane) Lee, Kevin R. (Gloria) Lee, Floyd G. (Cathy) Lee, and one daughter, Bethany J. (Scott) Fulford; eleven grandchildren; one brother and two sisters; several nieces and nephews and other relatives. He was preceded in death by his wife of 47 years, Bonnie L. (Wells) Lee. Mr. Lee was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1935, and reared in Dalton, Arkansas. He was baptized into God's Church in 1971 and was a long-time faithful servant. Mr. Lee touched the lives of many people both in and outside of God's Church. He was a fine example and an inspiration to many. Until the day of his death, he continually pointed all of his family and friends to our Great Creator God and His way of life. He will be greatly missed while we await God's coming Kingdom. Mr. Daniel Friz conducted his funeral service.

**Mr. Frank Harold**, an original member of the Atlanta, Georgia, congregation of God's Church, died April 1 at the age of 89 years, after an eight-month battle with cancer. Mr. Harold was baptized in 1965 and was a dedicated member of God's Church. For many years he and his family drove from their home in Knoxville, Tennessee, to Birmingham, Alabama, to attend Sabbath services because that was the closest congregation. Mr. Harold was a faithful "behind-the-scenes" servant of others. His quick wit and warm smile are sorely missed by all who knew him. Mr. Harold is survived by Wanda, his wife of 61 years, and by their three children, Perry, Ronald, and Teresa Ellison (Atlanta congregation) as well as 5 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren. Mr. Jack Lowe, Area Pastor and long-time friend, conducted the funeral service.

**Mrs. Patricia A. Baker** died May 27, after a 27-month struggle with ALS (Lou Gehrig Disease). She was 66 years old. Mrs. Baker was a faithful and long-time member of God's Church in the Louisville, Kentucky area. Baptized when she was 22 years old, her Church family was very important to her and she served them well through the years. Patty is survived by Richard, her husband of 45 years, and two sisters, Joann Wallace and Wilma Suffridge. All through her illness, Patty was a wonderful example of positive endurance and she will be greatly missed. Mr. Lambert Greer conducted the funeral service on May 31.

**Mrs. Willadene "Willie" Blackman** died June 26 at her home at the age of 76 years. She was born May 4, 1935 in Monroe

County Iowa, graduated from Lovilla High School, and later moved to Des Moines. On August 14, 1955 she married Glenn Blackman. Mrs. Blackman was a homemaker, rearing their children, Debbie Crabtree, Donna Lemley and Randy Blackman of Des Moines; Deana Garrett of Peru; Dixie Olsen of Indianola and Bobbi Barnholdt of Anita. She enjoyed gardening, fishing with her family, cooking, playing cards, and spending time with their 15 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, whom she cherished. Mrs. Blackman also served as a deaconess in the Church of God. Besides her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, Mrs. Blackman is survived by Glenn, her husband of 55 years, and a brother and a sister. She was preceded in death by her parents and two brothers.

**Mrs. Dorothy Walden** of the Houston, Texas congregation, a member of God's Church for many years, died August 13 at age 85. She was predeceased by her husband, John Walden (also a member), and is survived by 2 children and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Mr. Ron McGowen officiated at her funeral service and burial.

**Mrs. Doris Smith** died August 14 in Ontario, Oregon where she had moved to be close to her family. She was a long-time Church member from Hulett, Wyoming. She was born January 16, 1922 in Rosewell, Idaho, the sixth child of nine brothers and sisters. After graduating from high school, she moved to Pendleton, Oregon and worked until her marriage to Ernest Smith in Casper, Wyoming. She and her husband raised Hereford cattle on their ranch east of Hulett. She enjoyed hiking, rock collecting and polishing, and, especially in the winter months, watching and feeding birds and deer in her yard. After her husband's death she did volunteer work for the Natural History Society at the Visitor's Center at Devils Tower National Monument, winning awards for her service there. Mr. and Mrs. Smith were long-time faithful members of the Church of God. Mrs. Smith was a widow for 23 years. She was glad to host Sabbath services and Holy Day services in her home when brethren in that area were unable to travel to services because of snow. She set a wonderful Christian example of love and service to others and will be greatly missed by all. Mrs. Smith is survived by three of her siblings. Mr. Ben Whitfield conducted her funeral on August 22, in Hulett, Wyoming.

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# COMMENTARY

## Give of Your Best

How did such a rich country as the United States fall into such crushing financial debt? Somewhere in its history, a substantial number of its people quit giving of their best, and started to look out for how much they could take from their fellow Americans.

Certainly we must help the truly needy; God Himself taught Israel to make provision for assisting its widows and orphans and those who are genuinely poor and destitute (e.g. Deuteronomy 14:29; James 1:27). Today, in America, millions languish in unemployment—willing and eager but unable to find work. Shockingly, however, it is not uncommon to find other Americans who avoid work and instead hold out their hands for assistance, neglecting to do all they can to better their own condition.

God's word, the Bible, is full of advice as to how we can prosper by using the abilities God has given us. We read: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). There was a time when explorers crossed a continent with that ideal in mind. Farmers tended crops with that ideal. Parents reared children with that ideal. People recognized the task at hand, however daunting it may have seemed, and they applied themselves to it with every bit of God-given energy they had.

In 1940, at an eighth-grade commencement ceremony, one speaker extolled the virtue of "Doing the best you can, with what you have, where you are." This was before the U.S. became involved in World War II, at a time when the nation was still reeling from the Great Depression.

I remember that speech so clearly because I was there. Consider the three parts of the speaker's exhortation. The first is to "do our best" the second is "with what you have" and the third is "where you are."

There is a fine line between helping the needy and harming the lazy. A well-administered social safety net provides genuine help to those who cannot help themselves, but a feel-good "handouts" program can actually sap us of our motivation to "do our best."

What about "with what we have"? Consider the example of the Apostle Paul, who wrote about challenges he faced, describing some of his own trials as "weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Corinthians 11:25–27).

And the third key—"where you are"? Paul described his ability to adapt to changing circumstances: "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Philippians 4:11). After doing all he could, Paul knew when to "let go" and trust that God would provide His needs (Matthew 6:33–34).

Our world presents many physical, economic and social challenges. It may be tempting to give in to the modern culture of wanting more while doing less. But, where God has given us the natural resources of ability, talent and drive, we owe it to Him to use those resources to find out what we can accomplish. Our Master expects it!

—Charles Knowlton