

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

LCG.org

May-June 2017

Choose Life over Lentils

Dear Brethren and Friends,

“If only I knew then what I know now...”

Regrettably, changing the past only happens in movies and books, *not* in real life. Missed business opportunities, a home not purchased, an education passed over... oh, the regrets. The clock never turns back. Well, almost never. There is Joshua’s long day, but even then, there is no indication that *decisions* could be reversed—only the sun. Missed opportunities are just that: opportunities passed by and that often never come again!

Make Your Decisions with Care

The Bible reveals that the decisions we make today should be made with care, as they may carry with them long-term consequences. Esau realized too late that his birthright was of far greater value than a bowl of soup. He was tired and hungry. How could he know? Then again, how could he not know? God tells us he despised his birthright and, “afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears” (Hebrews 12:17). As we are told in Genesis 27:38, “And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.” The die was cast! Imagine what it will be like in the resurrection when he realizes, to a degree he could never understand in his lifetime, the value of that bowl of lentils: the incredible real estate later given to the sons of Joseph!

Then there is the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. We understand this was a parable, but it was given to illustrate a lesson. The person, no matter how rich, who places his efforts and interests into the here and now is choosing unwisely. His “lentils” may come in a more elaborate bowl with more interesting spices, but, still, lentil soup it is!

The real-life young ruler, seeking eternal life, came to Jesus and was given a choice. He could remain as he was, or else, Jesus told him, “Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Mark 10:21). Evidently, his vast store and variety of lentils were more important to him than eternal life, for we are told that he “went away sorrowful.”

The lesson that should not be missed is that, following this encounter, Peter wanted to know what the disciples’ reward would be since they had left all to follow Him. Jesus’ answer to them has provided great encouragement to any who have suffered family or business conflict as a result of choosing the truth. “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29–30). Many of us have experienced the first part of this promise and are now looking forward to the age to come!

Understanding the Costs

Yet there are those who have little vision and who trade away the Kingdom of God for today’s lentil soup. Luke 9:57–62 gives three examples of men called to follow Christ, but who apparently chose to act on other priorities. While the rewards of discipleship are wonderful beyond our imagination, the immediate cost can be significant to mere humans such as you and me. This is why we are told we must “count the cost,” and why we normally review Luke 14:26 and the verses that follow prior to baptizing someone. For Jesus declared, “If

Volume 19, No. 3



Inside This Issue...

The Greatest Generation?... p. 3

Being of One Mind... p. 5

Meet the Council of Elders... p. 9

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit... p. 10

How Do You Count Pentecost?... p. 14

Lee Strobel’s Mistake in “The Case for Christ”... p. 15

The Young Reformer... p. 16

The Lie I Swallowed and Then Rethought... p. 20

Local Church News... p. 22

Commentary... p. 24

anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” We understand that “hate” here means to “love less by comparison,” yet some *have* been forced to choose between a spouse and obedience to God. Others have had to make a choice that disappoints and angers their parents. And how many have lost jobs or been passed over for promotions for following God’s Truth?

None of this should come as a surprise to those who read the scriptures, but did we ever hear a sermon on this subject in the churches that some of us once attended? I never did! And what about this passage? “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:34–37). We should never take these words lightly or think that Jesus did not mean them!

The Price—and Reward—of Discipleship

The cost of discipleship is being willing to give up everything that is near and dear. While this may be frightening, the reward is worth it. Consider: Is there anything you wouldn’t give up right now in exchange for eternal life in the Kingdom of God, if you knew you only had five minutes to live? What could possibly compare with coming back to life and living forever without pain or suffering? Consider further: Just how long do you have—five minutes, five days, five years, five decades? Not a one of us can know for certain that we will see another day, but even if we live a long, prosperous, and physically rewarding life, it will come to an end sooner than we once imagined. Jesus asks, “For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?” (Matthew 16:26, *ASV*). And then He promises the person who puts it all on the line for the Kingdom, that he will be rewarded according to his works (v. 27).

Sacrificing today for tomorrow is something most of us do as a matter of routine. We do our homework in school

because we know it will go better the next day in class. We educate ourselves to get ahead in the work world. We save some of our paycheck to make a special purchase. We postpone sexual gratification to prepare for a more special relationship with a lifelong mate. And we take time to pray and study so we can have a relationship with our Creator, knowing that we need His daily assistance if we are to be in the Kingdom of God.

How many have we known along the way who dropped out of the race? What form of lentil soup were they pursuing? What difficulty was so great that they would toss in the towel and give up eternal life? Clearly, they lost the vision or never had it. Sadly, most never realized the gravity of the choice they were making. What about you? Do you recognize how the little decisions each day—whether to pray, whether to study, whether to fast, whether to give of yourself for others—all add up to whether you are choosing eternal life or lentil soup?

There are several references in the New Testament describing a future day when some will weep and gnash their teeth over the poor decisions they made. They will only understand after gaining a glimpse into what they traded away. Right now, we do not know all that God has in mind for His faithful children. How *can* we know? We are physical, mortal beings. God is Spirit and eternal. But we can trust our Heavenly Father. And we can do as Moses, who chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Hebrews 11:25–26, *KJV*).

We, too, must have respect for the reward offered us and recognize that respect is shown in the daily decisions we make. As Luke 16:10 tells us, “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.”

Let us act on what we *do* “know now”—avoiding a future of regret and demonstrating that we choose life over lentils.



Editor in Chief: Roderick C. Meredith

Editorial Director: Richard F. Ames

Managing Editor: Wallace Smith

Asst. Managing Editor: Gary F. Ehman

Art Editor: John Robinson

Regional Editors: Robert Tyler (Australasia)

Stuart Wachowicz (Canada)

Adam West (Europe)

Editorial Assistant: William L. Williams

Asst. Copy Editors: Sandy Davis • Linda Ehman • Genie Ogwyn

Business Manager: Dexter B. Wakefield

The *Living Church News* is published bimonthly by the Living Church of God, 2301 Crown Centre Drive, Charlotte, NC 28227. Subscriptions are sent without charge to all members of the Living Church of God.

©2017, Living Church of God™. Printed in the USA. All rights reserved. Postage paid at Charlotte, NC.

Postmaster: Send address changes to

The Living Church News • P.O. Box 3810 Charlotte, NC 28227

The Living Church of God is not responsible for the return of unsolicited articles and photographs. Scriptures are quoted from the *New King James Version* (©Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers) unless otherwise noted.

Image(s) used under license from Shutterstock.com



The Greatest Generation?

Every generation has its challenges. Tom Brokaw wrote about those growing up during the Great Depression and fighting in World War II as “The Greatest Generation.” Without doubt, many suffered through hard times and overcame the brutalities of a war that ended 70 million hopes and dreams. Those who saw warfare firsthand experienced something that the rest of us cannot imagine, no matter how hard we try, and no matter how graphic Hollywood portrays it. We, their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, are here because some of them were the blessed survivors.

Is it too cynical to ask an objective question, “Was this truly the greatest generation?” Or was it simply a great title for a book, and a mantra people repeated without questioning? Those of that generation can certainly hold their heads high when it comes to overcoming adversity. While people often speak of the “good ol’ days,” how many really want to go back to the hardships they faced? No thank you! We prefer our indoor plumbing, air conditioning, and comfortable car with all the electronic gadgetry, especially the warm seat on a “ten-below” morning!

Looking More Closely

So much of this progress is the direct result of the intelligent and hardworking men and women of that generation. They gave us television, took us to the moon, and made life easier and safer for those of us they brought

into the world. But perhaps this last point is where the *greatest generation* fell short. In their sincere desire to give their children a better life than they had growing up, they raised a generation of spoiled, ungrateful rebels-without-a-cause. At least that is the case in the Western world. Certainly, not every baby boomer was spoiled, ungrateful, and rebellious, but too many were. In place of gratitude, many blamed their parents for what troubles they did have.

Music executives from the greatest generation discovered it was monetarily profitable to tap into the natural youthful desire to chart one’s own course. They gave us “rock and roll” and all that eventually came with it: disrespect for authority, sexual license and drug culture. The Beatles came out of Liverpool clubs to the United States singing, “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” but in short order they wanted to put something in it. Their song “I Am the Walrus” clearly spoke the message, “Smoke Pot, Smoke Pot, Everybody Smoke Pot.” Even if people deny the meaning of the words, no one can deny the impact that the Beatles’ libertarian attitude about drugs had on the culture they so powerfully influenced. And, of course, they were not alone—in neither their suggestive lyrics, nor their licentious example.

The legacy of the greatest generation was tarnished by a sincere, but ultimately misguided desire to provide an easier life for their children. Not all baby boomers went the wrong way, nor was it entirely their fault for rebelling against events they could not understand. Vietnam was one of the challenges of *that* generation.

Changing Ideologies

Much of what we see following World War II down to our time today is the result of accepting ideas from science falsely so-called. Many of the greatest generation embraced Charles Darwin’s idea of creation without a Creator, as well as ideas by social thinkers, such as Karl Marx, who promoted an end-justifies-the-means philosophy. The theories of Sigmund Freud were followed by the work of Masters and Johnson,



US soldiers approaching the Omaha Beach landing during D-Day.

which significantly contributed to the launch of the sexual revolution, and John Dewey injected liberalism into education in the United States and elsewhere. Dr. Benjamin Spock published *Baby and Child Care* in 1946, helping promote a more permissive approach to rearing children. Not all that Spock wrote was without merit, but the pendulum swung far, and the boomer generation ended up far less responsible than their parents. All these and many others over the last couple of centuries played a role in transforming the world to become what it is today. For all their positives, the greatest generation failed to recognize or defeat these wrong-headed movements.

It was the greatest generation that allowed prayer to be kicked out of American schools in 1964. The sum of the last 75 years has been what amounts to a total loss of moral authority. God was out. Human “reason” replaced the Bible. France, the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and most other Western nations have bought into the doctrine of secular humanism, the idea that you can have a moral society without God. How is that working out?

People are overwhelmed by governmental corruption and ineptitude and are turning to more radical leaders to solve their problems. What we see today is the rise of the “strong man,” not only in the West, but around the world. When governments fail to solve the people’s problems, people are willing to give power to a populist. Sometimes a strong leader steps up and takes charge in a positive way. Other times nations get an Adolf Hitler or a Benito Mussolini.

Few people know that the term “dictator” was once used in a positive sense. The Roman Republic was originally ruled by two men, not one; but when a fiscal or military crisis arose, a single individual was chosen to lead the country for a short duration, perhaps as short as six months. They understood that a strong leader who will take decisive action is needed during difficult times. His title was Dictator. When the crisis was over, they went back to two-man rule.

England had a strong leader in Winston Churchill, but they were not ready for or desirous to have such a man prior to, or after, World War II. The person *Time Magazine* called “Man of the Century” was turned out of office once the crisis was over.

For decades, the Church of God has proclaimed the rise of the strong man—something the world is only beginning to recognize, as seen in a few recent headlines. The prophet Daniel foretold an end-time King of the North and King of the South in Daniel 11. The book of Revelation refers to both a strong political leader, known as the Beast (the same as the King of the North), and a strong religious leader, the False Prophet, popularly referred to as the Antichrist.

The Beast and False Prophet, it appears from Scripture, will bring a deceptive sense of order, peace, and prosperity to

the world, but it will be quite temporary and its end will come suddenly (Revelation 17:12; 18:9–10).

Our world is descending into a time of great trouble as each succeeding generation moves further away from God. God warns in Romans 1:18–19, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.”

Generations in Denial

As man explores the inner workings of living cells, he is confronted with design, machinery and engineering, the likes of which Charles Darwin could never imagine. Inside our cells are protein machines that transport materials from one location to another along self-assembling highways. There are waste disposal systems, recycling plants, and communication mechanisms. Note this quote from Michael Denton’s *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*.

Molecular biology has shown that even the simplest of all living systems on earth today, bacterial cells, are exceedingly complex objects. Although the tiniest bacterial cells are incredibly small... each is in effect a veritable microminiaturized factory containing thousands of exquisitely designed pieces of intricate molecular machinery, made up altogether of one hundred thousand million atoms, far more complicated than any machine built by man and absolutely without parallel in the non-living world (p. 250).

That is an amazing statement: “far more complicated than any machine built by man”! And this is something that can be verified by scientists who believe in evolution! Consider what this means. Even a modern jet aircraft cannot match the complexity found in living cells! And yet, we are expected to believe that they came into being by chance!

DNA is nothing less than code written by an intelligence far greater than our own. Even though the Apostle Paul had no idea what man would discover in our day, he continues in Romans 1:20, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made...”

Only the most hardened, prejudiced or ignorantly deceived can possibly believe that life, with all its beauty, design, and complexity could happen by chance; but humanity has chosen to believe a lie rather than God (v. 25). The result is recorded in advance. “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting” (Romans 1:28).

THE GREATEST GENERATION? continues on page 23



Being of *One Mind*

By **Gary F. Ehman**

Jesus was gone! He no longer walked among His disciples. Even though He had been resurrected, as they gathered together for the annual Feast of Firstfruits, the grim thought of His crucifixion still weighed heavily on the minds of the disciples. But before that astonishing Feast day occurred, some of those closest to Him had seen Him taken up into heaven.

He had said to them: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:7–9). While they gazed upward, two angels appeared suddenly and further instructed them: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (v. 11).

What had occurred in their lives was stunning. Their friend, companion and teacher had been brutally murdered at the instigation of their own countrymen. The sight of His

torn, bloody body nailed to the stake—along with His resurrection and appearance among them for 40 days—continued to have a profound impact on them. His last words prior to His ascension—that they should wait together in Jerusalem—were perplexing.

A People Continuing with One Accord

But all of these events, together, brought a new feeling of anticipation they never had before. “And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers” (vv. 13–14).

The Scripture uses the phrase “one accord.” It is the center post of this article, because, even to this day, it is a phrase with deep meaning as we prepare to observe Pentecost together. The Greek word translated “accord,” as it is used in verse 14, is *homothumadon* (pronounced hom-oth-oo-mad-on’), and in this context means they were *unanimous* regarding what they were thinking and in their mindset. This English phrase is used 30 times in the Bible—once in the Old

Testament, 29 times in the New, and 25 of those references are in the Book of Acts alone.

We are seeing a diverse people gathered together in anticipation of what the Master said would come. The word “continued” in verse 14 is more than it seems in English. The Greek word translated there is *proskartereō* (pros-kar-ter-eh’-o), meaning to adhere to one another and to be devoted and constant with each other. When added to “one accord,” it is an *awesome* statement of unity.

The Feast of Pentecost finally arrives in Acts 2:1–4, and Luke, again, explains that the disciples were “with one accord”: “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (v. 1).

The Spirit of God is one of unity. Paul uses the phrase “perfectly joined together,” from the Greek word *katartizō*, meaning mended or repaired to become one, which can only happen through the Holy Spirit. It is the opposite of division. **Paul was single-minded about this. He realized that a house divided against itself will fall.**

Members of the Living Church of God will similarly be gathered together on June 4, 2017 to observe the Day of Pentecost, and we will, hopefully, be of one accord—hopefully with like passion about what we are doing and why we are doing it. The opening chapters of the Book of Acts give us an introduction to the fledgling Church of God. They were uniquely aware of one another, stirred by a power in them that was previously known only by isolated individuals (cf. John 14:17).

The phrase “one accord” begins to show the passion being developed in them through the Holy Spirit. It began to spread throughout those moved to conversion: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart...” (Acts 2:42–46).

Again, as before, we see that they “continued steadfastly”—were devoted and constant with each other—but with emphasis on being so *within a community*, the Church, centered in total love and commitment to others.

The Greatest Purpose in Existence

Today, we are being introduced to and trained in a way of life and thinking that will eventually *alter the entirety of the universe!* Is that too big a statement for us to swallow? No, it should not be too big! This is something that we need to wrap our minds around, as we continue our journey through this new Holy Day season.

The Bible says we should deeply understand this. “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: **‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the**

heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:7–10). God has revealed this to us, His 21st-century sons and daughters. It is a Pentecost revelation for us.

Still not convinced? “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit [which] is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (vv. 11–13).

A True Spirit of Unity

We must realize the unifying importance of the Holy Spirit in all this. What was done to those people on the Day of Pentecost 31AD, collectively, has been done to us, individually. We are added to this universe-changing process through the Spirit in us (vv. 14–16).

The Apostle Paul, singularly, championed this concept of being of one accord, of one mind. “Then we who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1, *KJV*). But notice Paul’s further thrust: “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God” (vv. 5–7). Notice the words: “*like-minded toward one another*,” “*with one mind*,” “*receive one another*.”

These are very *unifying* words. The Greek word translated “with one mind” is, again, *homothumadon*, the same word that we saw Luke use earlier when he described the disciples as being of “one accord.” It speaks to a passionate

agreement regarding their thinking, their mindsets, and how they related to one another.

This unity not only continues throughout the New Testament—it grows in magnitude. Many astounding things were taking place after the Day of Pentecost 31AD, and it caused confrontation with the religious community around them. After performing a miraculous healing, the Apostles were taken to task: “But when they [the Jewish leadership] had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, ‘What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.’ So, they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:15–18).

The full story clearly shows that all of this was not just about the Apostles. They certainly were in accord, but notice they went back to the congregation and reported everything to them: “And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: ‘Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them...’” (vv. 23–24).

Luke further amplifies this: “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any

of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common” (vv. 31–32). The phrase “one heart and one soul” indicates that they were singular in their passions, their desires—united in their affections, purposes, and endeavors. Centered in it was the Holy Spirit. Luke writes that this was true of “the *multitude* who believed”: *All of them* were of one mind. What we see here is the work of the Spirit of God in His Church.

A Special Focus of the Apostle Paul

This unity of the Spirit was a rallying cry of the early Church, and especially of the Apostle Paul, who fought against division. He recognized that Satan would attempt to divide Church members: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

The Spirit of God is one of unity. Paul uses the phrase “perfectly joined together,” which is translated from the Greek word *katartizō* (kat-ar-tid’-zo), meaning mended or repaired to become one, which can only happen through the Holy Spirit. It is the opposite of division. Paul was single-minded about this. He realized that a house divided against itself will fall: “For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it” (1 Corinthians 11:18; see also Matthew 12:25). He went on to state, “...that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice



with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Corinthians 12:25–27).

Paul says we must “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). What does this mean to you, personally? Whatever it is, it involves our conduct—better defined as our citizenship—and it must be an effort worthy of Jesus’ message of the Kingdom of God.

We are back to the idea of being of one mind. But here Paul’s words “one spirit” introduces the concept of our unity through God’s Spirit now in us.

Paul’s words translated “striving together” suggest athletes in competition together—wrestling in company with others. This is tag-team time! Paul continues the idea in his epistle to the Philippians: “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affec-

Ephesians 4:15–16 truly exemplifies what this article is all about. We Christians are the body that is “joined and knit together,” **each part is in its right place, tightly united to the rest for the benefit of the whole.**

tion and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Philippians 2:1–2).

All of this should sound familiar to those of us who took the Passover earlier this year. Why all of this oneness, unity and accord? Why should it be singularly important to us? Jesus explained it this way: “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:16–21). Jesus prayed this for us and then, on Pentecost, sent the one thing that would ensure it—**God’s Holy Spirit**.

The Church Then and Now: Called to Unity

The early Church—and we, here, in the end time—were and are called to this “one accord,” this unity of purpose. It is the most profound thing that can happen to a human mind. And we are not to merely value it, but we are to totally, without holding back, actively involve ourselves in it. As the Apostle Paul stated: “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism...” (Ephesians 4:1–5).

As Christians, we will keep the Day of Pentecost—and we understand the reasons why. We will keep it because we have been given, just as our brethren at the very start of the Church were given, God’s Holy Spirit. Paul says we are to be in accord with that Spirit “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (v. 3). There is only one Holy Spirit, and Paul says that our job is to be diligently “endeavoring” to keep that Spirit centered in our accord with our brethren—to guard it closely and prevent it from being lost or stolen.

The Day of Pentecost draws near—the pivotal point in God’s plan of salvation. It truly is the beginning point that personally involves individual Christians, linking us in a unique way to that plan. There is more to the story of the Day of Pentecost, and Paul reveals the awesome scope of it to the Ephesian Church, explaining God’s desire that “speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:15–16).

This truly exemplifies what this article is all about. We Christians are the body that is “joined and knit together”—translated from a Greek word (*sunarmologeō*) suggesting that each part is in its right place, tightly united to the rest for the benefit of the whole.

What is Paul alluding to here?

The answer is a staggering concept that brings to life what Jesus promised the night before His death. As Paul explains, “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:18–22).

We are the “temple of God”—where the Greek here indicates not the broader temple complex (the *hieron*), but the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies themselves (*naos*), where God dwelt with man. He is building in us—as the focal point—His plan to reconcile His creation to Himself.

We can say today, as our brethren on that Day of Pentecost in 31AD in Jerusalem would say: “*kardia kai psuchē mia... proskartereō... homothumadon...*”—“With one heart and mind... continue steadfastly... in one accord.” ^(LN)

(Author’s note: All Greek definitions are based on comparisons between *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*, *Robertson’s Word Pictures* and *Thayers Greek Definitions*.)

MEET THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

How much do you know about the Living Church of God Council of Elders? The Council has long been an important part of God's Work.

While the Presiding Evangelist, Dr. Roderick C. Meredith, is the human head of the Work under Jesus Christ, an important part of the governance of the Church is the Council of Elders. Sometimes people ask questions about the Council, such as who is on it and what it does. We hope this summary will answer your questions!

The Council of Elders currently consists of fifteen ministers: Presiding Evangelist, Roderick C. Meredith; Evangelists Gerald E. Weston, Richard F. Ames and Douglas S. Winnail; and Pastors Dexter B. Wakefield, Roderick C. McNair, Lambert L. Greer, Jeffrey H. Fall, D. Rand Millich, Mario Hernandez, Sheldon Monson, Wallace Smith, Stuart Wachowicz, W. Wyatt Ciesielka and Richard H. Stafford.

From time to time, ministers may be rotated on and off the Council to give other men the experience of serving and to bring in fresh perspectives.

The Council meets three or four times a year. Two of those gatherings—typically in March and August—are teleconferences. The other two—usually in May and November—are longer, in which Council members come to Charlotte and attend in person for three days of meetings.

What does the Council do? The Church's governance is set up to assure the continuation of the Truth and the effective operation of the Work. The Council's main function is to advise the Presiding Evangelist, and Dr. Meredith solicits the Council

members' frank input on various matters. For example, the Council often discusses prophetic possibilities and developments, especially as time and world events continue to move forward. Dr. Meredith also seeks the Council's advice concerning topics such as hiring possibilities, budget concerns, and questions about how to do the Work more effectively and how to best serve the brethren around the world.

Mr. Gerald E. Weston has been officially appointed by Dr. Meredith to be his successor as Presiding Evangelist, and the Council has expressed strong support for that decision. However, should a future circumstance arise in which the Church's Presiding Evangelist dies or becomes incapacitated *without* appointing his successor, it would be the Council's responsibility to appoint a successor, in order to assure continuity of leadership.

What is a regular Council of Elders meeting like? In a typical meeting, after an opening prayer, the Presiding Evangelist will lead off with comments regarding the Work and the spiritual state of the Church. There will be regional reports and discussion of various items on the meeting agenda. Dr. Meredith often encourages candid comments from the various members, leading to full discussions. The Council members are committed to seeing that God's Truth and Work continue in strength to the end of this age.

Dr. Meredith has mentioned several times that there seems to be a greater unity among the leading men than he can recall seeing at any time except in the earlier days when Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was closely involved with the ministry on a daily basis. The Council of Elders is committed to seeing that unity continue and grow! 



Front Row: Douglas S. Winnail, Richard F. Ames, Roderick C. Meredith, Gerald E. Weston; **Back Row:** Sheldon Monson, Stuart Wachowicz, Roderick C. McNair, Mario Hernandez, Dexter B. Wakefield, Richard H. Stafford, Jeffrey H. Fall, Lambert L. Greer, W. Wyatt Ciesielka, D. Rand Millich, Wallace Smith



Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

By **Peter G. Nathan**

Shortly, we will be observing the Festival of Pentecost. Let's examine a subject today that relates to our keeping of that Festival in a way that is pleasing to our Father in heaven.

Matthew and Luke record for us a section of the teaching of Jesus known as the Beatitudes. Let's consider the first of those statements in relation to Pentecost:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3).

When we read this verse, many focus on the term *poor*, and in doing so it is natural to think of physical poverty. Poverty and the plight of the poor are discussed at length throughout the Bible, especially about the way in which those who have an abundance of this world's goods treat them. But Jesus Christ is not addressing this sort of poverty, nor is He talking about "God's poor" as certain religious groups like to style themselves. This verse has been used incorrectly to justify lives given to poverty and extreme self-denial as a form of righteousness.

The disciples themselves did not come from affluent backgrounds, but would not have been considered among the poor of that day. Grinding poverty was a reality of that society. The Jews were in servitude to the Romans, and "tax farming"—government collection of taxes through private individuals—was a tool of those who sought political influ-

ence with the Romans. Jewish society suffered as a result, with many poor impoverished people. Add to that the frequent famines that ravaged the land. We should not minimize those aspects of that time, just as so much poverty exists in our modern world. But despite poverty—then and now—it is not this state of poverty that Jesus was addressing. It is not "poor" in terms of the physical needs of life.

It is being *poor in spirit*. As we approach the day of Pentecost, on which God's Spirit descended upon the first-century Church, such a statement might seem an odd one. The Spirit of God given on Pentecost to the disciples is not the only "spirit" in existence. Rather than referring to being "poor" in the Holy Spirit, Jesus was addressing the state of the *human* spirit—that power that differentiates us from the rest of creation (1 Corinthians 2:11–12).

Being poor in spirit enables us to be made rich in a *specific manner*.

As the first of the Beatitudes, this sets the stage for everything to follow. If we can understand this properly, then we can understand Jesus Christ's message.

This concept of being "poor in spirit" is not found in other writings of the Greek-speaking world. But it *is* found in other Jewish writings from that time. It does appear in the writings discovered at Qumran, known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. This term appears in two different forms of documents, one of which was a hymn that may well have been sung in the temple. So those listening to Jesus, if they were alert to the temple services and the ideas expressed within their society, would have recognized this statement and the fact that it

was used as being the opposite of an ungodly trait. For in the documents from Qumran, being poor in spirit was considered alongside another condition: having a hard heart. So the disciples and others listening would be aware that Jesus was clearly talking about a spiritual condition.

Jesus is speaking about being poor in terms of our own spirit, not the Spirit of God. That is not a difficult aspect for us to understand. The challenge for each of us is to *apply* that in our personal lives—because the natural state of humanity is to be *right in our own eyes*. The book of Proverbs is full of instruction to the self-wise individual:

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil (Proverbs 3:7).

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise (Proverbs 12:15).

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts (Proverbs 21:2).

Contrast this with the attitude conveyed by Isaiah:

Thus says the LORD: “Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,” says the LORD. “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isaiah 66:1–2).

“Poor” is related to the human spirit here and its response to the word of God. Yet it is instructive to appreciate the term itself and its usage within Scripture. The term “poor” that is used by Isaiah “connotes some kind of disability or distress... It describes a man who has no property and who has thus to earn his bread by serving others” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6, p. 647). Such a person could have been “wrongfully impoverished or dispossessed” (*ibid.*, p. 888). “In the Law, the same ‘poor’ circumstances described by Isaiah referred to a person with no inheritance, or to one who had been wrongfully impoverished. Such an individual was protected by the Eternal through provisions in His Law” (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, p. 683, electronic ed.).

How do we see ourselves? As rich in this world’s goods, or impoverished because the god of this world has polluted every aspect of the environment in which we live? That pollution is not just physical but includes the *spiritual environment* in which humanity suffers and is impoverished by his evil ways. If we see the world as our Father and His Son see the it, we realize that humanity has been shortchanged. We have no inheritance here!

David uses the same expression in one of his Psalms. The context of the Psalm can only be guessed at. Perhaps this was written during the time he was being pursued by Saul, who was seeking to take his life. Or it may have been a later time in his reign. It was a time of distress. It was a time in which David clearly understood the transitory nature of the physical and the need for the Kingdom of God.

Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; and let those who love Your salvation say continually, “Let God be magnified!” But I am poor and needy; make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay (Psalm 70:4).

Even a king or perhaps a future king had to recognize his poverty and the futility of what exists in the here and now.

What about us? Are we poor in spirit? Or do we value our opinion or ideas over the word of God? What motivates us? Each of us probably has some area in our life where we think we know best. If we don’t see that, then we may not be reflecting on our life in the way in which we should. Notice the instruction to the church of Laodicea. Does it reflect a “poor spirit”?

Because you say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see (Revelation 3:17–18).

Let’s consider these elements regarding the Holy Day we are about to celebrate so that we have them clearly in our minds, as we appear before our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Example of Israel

The children of Israel were brought before the Eternal at Mount Sinai, on what is understood to be the Day of Pentecost. Some 50 days prior they had been in Egypt and had seen the hand of the Eternal upon the Egyptians, and had witnessed the miraculous intervention provided to free them from captivity. They had seen the plagues; they had witnessed the Passover; had passed through the waters of the Red Sea while the army of Egypt was drowned. They had been led by fire and cloud, then were given water from a rock, and manna to eat—literally a daily miracle. They camped at Mount Sinai in preparation for the Festival, where we find Moses in communication with the Eternal. Moses records the event and the Lord’s offer to Israel:

And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.” So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. Then all the

They were self-willed and self-centered in their lives—only concerned about their own physical needs. **Of all the adults who left Egypt, only Caleb and Joshua were able to inherit the promise, because they were of a different spirit.**

people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD (Exodus 19:3–8).

The scene described in the book of Exodus is a wonderful scenario, to be sure. When we look at the picture of the same scene as it is described in the book of Deuteronomy, however, a new but important detail emerges.

So it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders. And you said: “Surely the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he still lives. Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God anymore, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? You go near and hear all that the LORD our God may say, and tell us all that the LORD our God says to you, and we will hear and do it.” Then the LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me: “I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken. **Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always**

keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!

Go and say to them, ‘Return to your tents.’ But as for you, stand here by Me, and I will speak to you all the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe them in the land which I am giving them to possess” (Deuteronomy 5:23–31).

We see similar considerations of the state of the hearts of the children of Israel addressed in the book of Hebrews:

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your **hearts** as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their **heart**, and they have not known My ways.’ So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’” Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil **heart** of unbelief in departing from the living God (Hebrews 3:7–12).

How many times does the condition of the heart appear in this section? We must be mindful of the fact that the opposite of being poor in spirit is having a hard heart—the same sad commentary made by God on the spiritual state of Israel. And in the next chapter of Hebrews, we are told why the heart is so important.

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:11–12).

They never entered the Promised Land because they had the wrong heart. To express it in terms of Matthew 5, they weren’t poor in spirit. They were self-willed and self-centered in their lives—only concerned about their own physical needs. Of all the adults who left Egypt, only Caleb and Joshua were able to inherit the promise, because they were of a different spirit (Numbers 14:24; 32:12).

If we consider that day of Pentecost in 31 AD, we find this statement recorded as the response to the sermon given by Peter to the listening throng: “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37).

Note the contrast between their forebears, whose hearts were hardened and likened to stone, and these people listening to Peter, who had responsive hearts that could feel and respond. It demonstrates a fundamental difference. So, a condition of those responding to Peter on the Day of Pentecost was being poor in spirit.

Jeremiah was inspired to write about the changes that were to take place, whereby the Law of God could be placed within the heart, a process that began with several thousand during the events of that momentous day of Pentecost in 31AD (Acts 2:41).



Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive

their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jeremiah 31:31–34).

The Covenant with the Law of God was not to be merely *external* any longer; it was to be internal, written on the heart instead of on tablets of stone as it had been at Sinai. That required something other than a hard heart. It required that the individual be poor in spirit.

The promise provided by Jesus in the Beatitude for those who are poor in spirit is the Kingdom of God. Recall the comments we noted earlier about the use of the term “poor” in Isaiah and throughout God’s law, saying that indicates one who “has no property... a man with no inheritance... one wrongfully impoverished.” These conditions applied perfectly to the children of Israel in Egypt. They were offered a possession—a promised inheritance. Exodus 19:6 sets out the very nature of that inheritance. They were offered the privilege of being a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, something intrinsically greater than just land itself. As we’ve already read, they didn’t inherit at all. We are offered a great inheritance, so much greater than physical property. This Beatitude promises that we are offered an inheritance in the Kingdom of God, referred to in Matthew’s record of Christ’s words as the “Kingdom of Heaven.”

Jesus Christ an Example

The Gospels portray the example of Jesus Christ as one who did not seek His own will but that of His Father (Matthew 6:10; 12:50; 26:42; John 6:38–40; 7:17; Hebrews 10:7–10; Philippians 2:5–11). His life conveys to us what it meant to be truly poor in spirit.

To be poor in spirit as He was implies that we desire to be rich in the *Spirit of God*. At Pentecost, that gift was given to those who saw themselves for what they really were: sinners who needed repentance, forgiveness, and the Spirit of God to guide their paths. They saw themselves in need of a cardiac transplant, as it were, just as Jeremiah and Ezekiel had prophesied (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:26–27).

Returning to the Beatitudes as set out in Matthew’s Gospel, one translation conveys the intent well. The *New Century Version* states: “They are blessed who realize their spiritual poverty, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them” (Matthew 5:3).

Our place in the Kingdom of God—our inheritance—is dependent upon our receiving and using the Holy Spirit that has been so freely given to us. That demands that we empty ourselves, in a picture of what Jesus Christ did before us (Philippians 2:7, *ASV*), emptying ourselves of our own wants, comprehending our “spiritual poverty,” and focusing our lives on the ways of our Father—seeking His goals, intentions, behavior and standards. This is the starting point of our relationship with the Beatitudes that follow. (LH)

How Do You Count Pentecost?

John H. Ogwyn (1949–2005)



Editor’s note: Normally, counting the days to determine when to keep Pentecost is a very simple matter. In the Old Testament, the wave sheaf was offered during the Days of Unleavened Bread on the day after the weekly Sabbath (cf. Leviticus 23:11). That Sunday becomes “Day 1,” and the count of days proceeds to “Day 50”—which is the Day of Pentecost. A complication occurs, however, when the Days of Unleavened Bread begin on a Sunday and end on a weekly Sabbath: Is the wave sheaf offered on that first Holy Day, or is it offered the day after the last Holy Day, which would mean it is offered outside the Days of Unleavened Bread?

This classic article from Mr. John Ogwyn both answers that question and provides a beautiful example of rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

First, we should review God’s instructions in Leviticus 23:4–21. After reminding Israel about the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, God added instructions that would only apply *after* the nation had crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land: “When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest” (v. 10). The priest was to “wave the sheaf before the LORD” on the “day after the Sabbath” (v. 11). This began the 50-day count to Pentecost (vv. 15–16). Only after this ceremony could the people begin eating the new harvest (v. 14).

Keeping these instructions in mind, we can look ahead almost 40 years to the very first Passover season after Israel entered the Promised Land. Israel crossed the Jordan River and entered the land on the tenth day of the first month (Joshua 4:19). Immediately afterward, those who had been born during the wandering in the wilderness were circumcised (5:2–9).

The Israelites encamped in Gilgal, and “kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho” (v. 10). We then read that “they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day” (v. 11). The manna ceased, and Israel “ate the food of the land of Canaan that year” (v. 12). Considered in the context of Leviticus 23:10 and 23:14, *this can only mean* that the wave sheaf was offered on the day after the Passover: the first Holy Day of Unleavened Bread. In other words, the first day of Unleavened Bread came

on a Sunday, that year—and that was when the wave sheaf was offered, *not* on the Sunday that came a week later, after the two Holy Days of Unleavened Bread. Remember, food preparation was specifically permitted on the two Holy Days of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:16).

Think about it! If Israel had begun to eat parched ears and bread from the harvest of Canaan before the wave sheaf offering, this would mean that the first thing they had done upon entering the land was *ignore Moses’ clear instructions* in Leviticus 23:10. We know that this did not happen, because we are specifically told that Joshua “*left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses*” (Joshua 11:15).

Some become confused when they see that the *King James Version* and *Strong’s Concordance* both wrongly refer to Israel eating the “old corn” rather than the fresh harvest in Joshua 5:11–12. No other major translations or reference works make this mistake, and any Hebrew lexicon will demonstrate that the Hebrew word used here in Joshua *does not* refer to consuming the previous year’s harvest. Remember that any old grain from the previous spring would have been stored within the city walls of Jericho in preparation for the siege. *Only the grain in the field* would have been accessible to Israel. Furthermore, we are told that *Israel ate parched grain* on the first Holy Day—a reference to the method of preparing *still-green ears of barley*, not grain that was a year old.

We are *not* left to speculation or human reasoning to determine when to begin the Pentecost count. Rather, God has preserved an example in Scripture to make the point clear. (LH)

Lee Strobel's Mistake in "The Case for Christ"

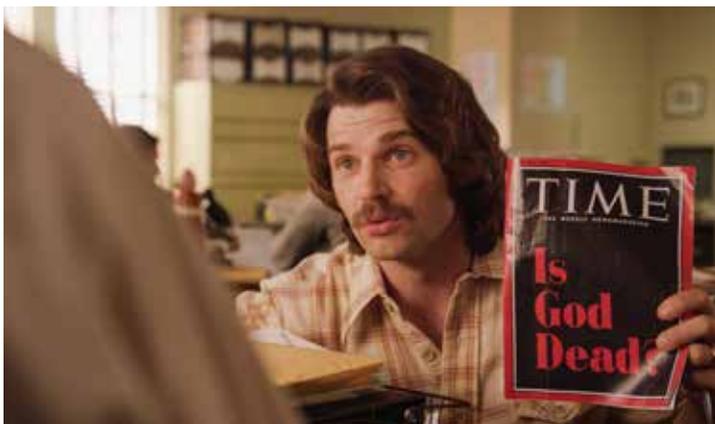
By **Wallace G. Smith**

I took my family to see the new movie "The Case for Christ," based on Lee Strobel's book by the same name, depicting his investigation into the facts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. What struck me most about the story is not Strobel's search, but where it ended.

I had seen an almost-complete version of the movie at the recent National Religious Broadcasters convention. It was introduced by Lee Strobel, himself, along with his wife, Leslie. Not many of us get to publicly announce a movie about our lives, but they both came across as humble and grateful. Lee explained that some details had been altered to make the movie (e.g., multiple real people in their lives were sometimes combined into one character, and multiple conversations were sometimes condensed into one interview). But, by his estimate, 85% of the movie was an excellent reflection of their own, real-life experience, including some of the movie's most crucial moments.

The central plot of "The Case for Christ" is easy to summarize. Early in their marriage, Leslie becomes what the world would call a "born-again Christian," creating a crisis for the couple, as Lee is an avowed atheist and is horror-stricken at his wife's decision. As an investigative journalist, he begins pouring his professional skills and resources into an effort to disprove the biblical account of Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead and to expose it as no more than a fantasy and a fairy tale.

His search, however, brings him to a very different conclusion. I'd worry about that being a spoiler for the movie, but, after all, the film isn't called "The Case *Against* Christ." The end result is a saved marriage and a series of very popular books.



Actor Mike Vogel depicting journalist Lee Strobel in "The Case for Christ"

As far as movies go, I enjoyed it. It is, in a real way, a love story about Lee and Leslie, and about the trip they take through places they never thought their marriage would go. And the quality of the filmmaking and acting seemed far better than I am used to in what is often labeled the "Christian" movie industry. Actors Mike Vogel and Erika Christensen portray the Strobels in a way that seemed very real and believable. A pleasant surprise, as well, was the film's treatment of atheists and "disbelievers," who came across as real and caring people (a.k.a., fellow human beings) instead of cartoonish caricatures—perhaps a reflection of the time Strobel himself spent in their camp.

I also enjoyed seeing a movie that discusses faith from a "truth claim" point of view, where the issue at stake is more than how your beliefs make you *feel*. The Bible makes claims about Jesus Christ that are either true or false, and if they are false then the entire enterprise of Christianity is nothing but foolishness and nonsense—worse than a waste of time, a waste of *life* (a point Paul makes abundantly clear in 1 Corinthians 15:12–19). Lee Strobel's journey is about following the facts and having the courage to stick with the evidence, wherever it might lead you. Too few are willing to do that.

I could certainly quibble with various details. For instance, we have good reason to believe that the Roman spear that was jammed into Jesus' side while He was crucified was more than a "certification" of His death; it was the ultimate cause of it. But those things aside, I believe that our film's hero makes a larger mistake. He doesn't go far enough.

If you've demonstrated that this man Jesus Christ was *real* and was shown to be the Son of God through His resurrection from the dead, and if you've been willing to apply a hard dedication to the facts to truly prove that to yourself, then go further. What did this Jesus Christ *really* teach? What did the very first Christians *really* believe? What message did He *really* bring from the God who resurrected Him?

I would invite Mr. Strobel—and those inspired by his hunt—to *keep* hunting. Those who claim that Jesus' life, death and resurrection are nothing more than a myth are wrong, and the facts expose their error to those who are sincerely looking. But most of those who claim to speak in Jesus' name today are *just as wrong*. They do not teach what He taught, and they do not bring the message He brought. The facts are there for any investigative journalists who bravely desire to **follow where the evidence will lead them.**

I'm glad someone has made the case for Christ. Now let's make the case for His message. (L)



The Young Reformer

By **Kenneth Frank**

In the history of Israel and Judah, the greatest Passover after the time of the Judges occurred in 622BC and was brought about by a 26-year-old king. This very significant Passover occurred during the last reformation of the Kingdom of Judah, ignited during a very dangerous time by King Josiah, who began his reign when he was just a boy.

Now we must ask the question: What influence can a young person have upon the course of national affairs? Can a young person change a nation for good? This bright young ruler did, and he's the hero whose story we will examine.

Light After a Legacy of Darkness

In the 600s BC, Judah—existing on a landbridge between Africa and Asia—found itself sandwiched between major world powers. To the northeast of Judah was Assyria and Assyria's growing rival, Babylon, while to the southwest, Egypt was Assyria's ally. Armies passing from one region to the other would naturally come through Judah.

In addition to geopolitical troubles, King Josiah had an equally troubled family history. His grandfather Manasseh was one of the worst kings in Judah's history, "who did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel" (2 Kings 21:2). His crimes included filling the nation with idolatry and even human sacrifice. He had a change of heart and repented later in life (2 Chronicles 33:12–13), but, sadly, his son Amon—Josiah's father—would actually *reverse*

some of his father's good changes. Amon's reign became so corrupt that his own servants killed him (2 Kings 21:23).

After the assassination of his wicked father, Josiah became king at the tender age of *eight years old* (2 Kings 22:1).

The Makings of a Righteous King

With all this negative influence from the errors of his father and grandfather, how does Josiah lead the last great revival before Judah's captivity? After several generations of wickedness, he breaks this long cycle of wayward monarchs; he's a *light* in a very dark age, reigning from 640 to 609BC. And like his great-grandfather Hezekiah, he instituted sweeping religious reforms throughout Judah, and even into the remnants of the House of Israel. He was one of Judah's strongest spiritual leaders, serving God with repentance, humility, obedience and devotion. He is the only king of whom it is said that "he did not turn aside" (v. 2).

Josiah's name meant "the Eternal Supports" in ancient Hebrew, and he certainly had godly support. Zephaniah prophesied early in Josiah's reign, while Jeremiah started to prophesy later, around Josiah's thirteenth year. His mother is actually named in the Bible: Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah. When women are named in the Bible, it is a sign of significance. These two men and his mother surely had a profound impact on young Josiah, directing him towards God and away from the heathenism of his ancestors.

Josiah's early life would have been guided by such adult influence to an obviously positive result: "For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David..." (2 Chronicles 34:3). When he was just 20,

he began to purge the land. He wanted to consolidate worship in Jerusalem to prevent the rise of paganism once again. He also took his efforts to the territories beyond Judah, “cleaning house” in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon and Naphtali, which were still inhabited by remnants of the Israelite tribes that had been carried off by the Assyrians (vv. 6–7).

Reforms of the Righteous

What specifically did Josiah accomplish? We know that he began to purge the kingdom of pagan worship. 2 Chronicles 34 gives a detailed account:

...in the twelfth year [of his reign] he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images. They broke down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars which were above them he cut down; and the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images he broke in pieces, and made dust of them and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And so he did in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, as far as Naphtali and all around, with axes. When he had broken down the altars and the wooden images, had beaten the carved images into powder, and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem (vv. 3–7).

But his work did not stop with purging. He also set out to rebuild, sending his servant Shaphan the scribe to direct Hilkiah the high priest to take the money given by the people and deliver it to those repairing and restoring the Temple of God, which had been neglected and left in disrepair for so long (2 Kings 22:3–5)!

As the work to restore the Temple of God was being done, a discovery was made: “Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, ‘I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.’ And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, **and he read it**” (v. 8).

Isn’t that amazing? After so much backsliding, God’s word had been hidden in some dusty, dark corner of the Temple. People had not read it—perhaps in generations—and the high priest discovered it as they were cleaning out the mess! When Shaphan the scribe goes to Josiah to update him on the progress, he informs his king about the discovery: “Then Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, ‘Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.’ And Shaphan read it before the king” (v. 10).

This was profound, even life-changing. It was as if Josiah had never heard it before—he was 26 and had never heard the word of God—at least not like this! “Now it happened, when

the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes” (v. 11). That was the conventional reaction at that time, when you were personally shocked and horrified by what you’ve learned. Josiah was *personally* moved by the word of God.

What did he read? We can only speculate, but 2 Kings 22:19 might suggest that he heard the passages about the curses from Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, and he *knew* what was coming upon his people for their lack of faithfulness to God. And so he tore his garments.

So what happened next? 2 Kings 22 records that Josiah sent a delegation composed of Hilkiah the priest, Shaphan the scribe, Shaphan’s son Ahikam, Achbor son of Michaiah, and Asaiah, a servant of the king, commanding them, “Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us” (v. 13). The five sought out Hulda, a prophetess.

Promise and Prophecy

She made an important statement to them, confirming that God’s word does not change: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read—because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods... Therefore My wrath shall be aroused against this place and shall not be quenched’” (2 Kings 22:16–17). Concerning Josiah himself, however, God inspired Hulda to tell him that because of his responsive heart, his humility, and his compassion for his people, “I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place” (v. 20).

Thus we see that God promised Josiah that because of his righteousness, the judgment on Judah would not come in his lifetime.

Now Josiah may have wondered if God might relent, as he did concerning Nineveh in the book of Jonah. And it’s interesting that Jeremiah, one of Josiah’s contemporaries, wrote this from God: “[I]f that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it” (Jeremiah 18:8).

This could very well have motivated Josiah—he would do what was right and leave the rest in God’s hands. Christians today, in a similar way, also know the outcome of the last stage of man’s history. But we do what we can to proclaim God’s Truth to those who will heed. Josiah did not give up, nor must we! In fact, he *stepped up* his efforts to cleanse the land of idolatry. He left the ultimate outcome *in God’s hands*, as we do today—without neglecting the commission to follow and obey God.

Josiah's next step was made all the more possible by his position. Note how important it is for a godly leader to provide direction: "Now the king sent them to gather all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. The king went up to the house of the LORD with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the LORD" (2 Kings 23:1–2). He *read*, he *took that responsibility*, and he did *not* keep the word of God to himself! He shared it with his nation!

Standing by a pillar, Josiah read the book of the Covenant, and *made* a covenant to renew his nation's obedience to God—and his people "took a stand for the covenant" (v. 3). So, like leader, like people! Now, **they** were repentant, **they** were changing, **they** were overcoming—because of the example of this godly 26-year-old king! He used his authority to make sweeping changes. And though most of us today are not kings and queens, we can still have an influence in the lives of others by our own examples.

Josiah continued to purge Judah and Jerusalem of sin—destroying the altars, idols and priestly offices that had been set up for the worship of Baal, sexually immoral religious practices, and the other hideous abominations that were going on, including child sacrifice (vv. 4–15). Some of the measures would have left a grave impression on the minds of the people, such as burying the bones of idolaters in their own places of worship to defile them and to warn people away (vv. 14–16). Some of the practices he abolished went all the way back to the time of Solomon.

And, as he was rooting out these practices, he committed one act of particular interest to Bible history and prophecy: "As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs that were there on the mountain. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar, and defiled it according to the word of the LORD **which the man of God proclaimed**, who proclaimed these words" (2 Kings 23:16).

You see, long before, right after the reign of King Solomon, when Jeroboam set up the golden calf at Bethel, a man of God came and gave this prophecy earlier in the book of 1 Kings: "O altar, altar! Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men's bones shall be burned on you'" (1 Kings 13:2). That man of God prophesied about Josiah by

name *three hundred years* before Josiah was born, and it came to pass **exactly as God said! The grave of the man of God was still there**, to which Josiah paid respect before continuing his work (v. 17–18).

The Passover Reinstated

When he returned to Jerusalem, Josiah made a profound decree: "Then the king commanded all the people, saying, 'Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant'" (v. 21).

A much more thorough account of this Passover is given in 2 Chronicles 35: "Now Josiah kept a Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem, and they slaughtered the Passover lambs **on the fourteenth day of the first month**" (v. 1). This occurred in 622BC when Josiah is 26 years old and is one of ten Passover observances recorded in the Bible. It is also the first *centralized* Passover in centuries, because Josiah invited these

remnants of the house of Israel to come down and worship. He also reinvested responsibility to the Levitical priesthood, especially with regard to *teaching* the people about what had been

The young king wanted to cleanse the land and the peoples' hearts from idols! He implemented great changes that helped to banish idolatry in his time, but his efforts yielded spiritual fruit as well.

neglected, and he returned the Ark of the Covenant to the temple, from where it had been removed during or before the reigns of Manasseh and Amon (vv. 2–6).

Josiah gave generously of his own stock to get things started (v. 7) and his example inspired others (vv. 8–9). This restoration of worship included not just the Passover, but also of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (v. 17) and had such an impact that it was described this way: "There had been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet; and none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as Josiah kept, with the priests and the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (v. 18).

2 Chronicles 35:20 highlights that this observance took place the very same year that the Book of the Law was discovered. Josiah had **immediately** implemented the necessary changes.

The young king wanted to cleanse the land *and the peoples' hearts* from idols! He implemented great changes that helped to banish idolatry in his time, but his efforts yielded spiritual fruit as well: "Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him" (2 Kings 23:25).

But there was still an accounting to be made for Israel and Judah's sins: "Nevertheless the LORD did not turn from

the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him” (2 Kings 23:26). The judgment against Judah and Jerusalem was only **postponed** during the reign of Josiah—it was not rescinded. Manasseh’s apostasy was a permanent infection, even though he himself later had a change of heart. The nation was too far gone, and even then Josiah’s reforms lasted only until his death. “And the LORD said, ‘I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there’” (v. 27). Judah, Jerusalem and the temple would all be lost in 586BC.

And today, we Christians are responsible for conducting ourselves according to God’s word, as a body of believers and as individuals, though our world still has to suffer the Tribulation ahead.

Josiah’s Death Fulfills Prophecy

Josiah’s reign may not have ended the way that one would expect for so righteous a king in God’s sight, but it was one more lesson in how God works all things according to His will. The book of 2 Chronicles details the fall of Josiah, as he went out to war against the king of Egypt at that time, the Pharaoh Necho (2 Chronicles 35:20–27).

The kingdoms of Egypt, Syria, and Babylon all had their conflicts and politics, and the little kingdom of Judah was caught in the middle of these warring powers going back and forth across its territory, as was mentioned before. “After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him” (v. 20). Necho ruled Egypt from 610 to 595BC. Necho’s object was not to fight against Judah (v. 21)—rather, he was trying to go and aid his ally, the Assyrians, against the Babylonians, who had moved west and were threatening Syria and Judah. Necho worried that these forces would eventually work their way down and threaten Egypt itself. But along the way Josiah goes out against him and delays him. In doing so, Josiah gets caught up in a current of events that ultimately was being guided by God (v. 21) to bring Judah’s eventual fate upon it, and he is mortally wounded by Egyptian archers, eventually dying in Jerusalem (vv. 23–24).

Though Josiah’s decision to fight the Egyptians seemed to go against him, even his death fulfilled a previous prophecy—that he would not see the “calamity” God would bring upon the nation of Judah (2 Chronicles 34:28). And in this fulfilled prophecy, we see the echoes of another prophet of God: “The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart; merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil” (Isaiah 57:1).

Lessons from Josiah’s Life for Ours

Upon his death, Josiah’s reformation ebbed away, regrettably. Judah was overthrown at last by the Babylonians, and the stage was eventually set for the next phase of Israel’s history.

What lessons can we learn from the life of this young king? First, remember that Josiah’s father died when Josiah was only eight years old. He grew up without his natural father. His was likely a sorrowful childhood, in a dangerous time. Growing up without a father, but with godly influences from his mother and God’s servants, Josiah learned to **seek God early in life**. And that is important! Don’t wait until some imagined age when you will get serious, knuckle down and begin to serve God. Seek God early in life, even if you do not live in a godly home. Continue to seek God, even as Josiah did. He continued what he began, and that can be difficult at times when you’re on your own as a teenager. But be faithful, as Josiah was. You’ll be tempted to think that it’s not going to work. **But trust God!**

Next, we read that Josiah obeyed the word of God even though he lived in an evil age, just like you and I do. He did what God said, regardless of the world around him. He was going to make changes—in his life, and with all those he could potentially influence. There’s a difference between doing right in the sight of *people*, and doing right in the sight of *God*. Josiah chose the latter. When we read that he began following the word of God, **then** God’s House was restored, and the Passover along with it. That will be true in any history or any age of God’s Church—*following and obeying the word of God will restore the Church*, in body and in spirit.

Finally, we live in a time when the word of God is buried and forgotten in the world, even though we have millions of copies of it all across the land and all around the globe. Churches don’t teach from it! What’s popular today is “feel good” and “health and wealth” psychobabble, which is an empty shell, leaving people without **truth**—without **knowledge** of what God requires. Josiah humbled himself and appealed to God’s mercy, and for that his people enjoyed the greatest Passover in hundreds of years—even greater than that of his great-grandfather Hezekiah, who also implemented a great reformation. Josiah was a great king, teacher and example. Young people, you **can** make an impact for God for the people of **your time and age**.

And, even though we know what is determined for our peoples because of our national sins, we’re still accountable to God to fulfill our mission of preaching the Gospel to those who will listen and respond, just as Josiah did, and God judges us for our faithfulness to the task. Changing world events is God’s business. But **all of us**, young and old, can serve God as did Josiah—as we are admonished, with all of our hearts, all of our souls, and all of our strength (Deuteronomy 6:5). So make that difference—in **your time!** ^(LN)

Woman to Woman

The Lie I Swallowed and Then Rethought

By **Glory Talbott**

I imagine you were a printer by profession. You've been printing for well over a decade, and you love your job. You've found it to be productive and fulfilling. You have passion for striving for excellence in that profession: you use the best inks, the highest quality paper, and you only print for companies you believe will help make a difference in the world. You do it because it means a lot to you, and nothing compares to how you feel about being the best printer you can be. If you had to pick a profession again, you have no doubt—you'd do it all over again.

However, what if about 75 percent of the population *despises* the printing profession and thinks that printers are doing a serious disservice to their clients, draining the world of structure and creativity. Everything you love about the career you've dedicated your energy towards is continually put down by others. Society has a bias *against* printers. Would you maintain the affection and passion you feel toward your profession and still find a sense of high reward for a completed job?

I invented this imaginary scenario using a profession my husband used to have—printing—to shed light on something I consider an important but unpopular profession: being a homemaker and rearing my children at home.

Society's Disapproval

I feel passionate about molding my two beautiful girls into loving human beings. I'm not saying every family should do this, but for our family, that task has also included homeschooling them. It's been my career for well over a decade, and it is by far the most important job I've ever done or will ever do. Yet we live in a world which doesn't recognize it as being a productive and important job. As recently as March 20, Australia's *Daily Telegraph* website posted an op-ed by Sarah Le Marquand, the founding editor of their "RendezView" feature, where she proclaimed her beliefs that "we should make it a legal requirement that all parents of children of school-age or older are gainfully employed." The title of the piece was an attention-getter: "It Should Be Illegal to Be a Stay-at-Home Mum."

And while I'm learning not to be deterred about what people think, this viewpoint does affect how all stay-at-home mothers, including homeschooling mothers, are perceived. And it affected me.

Surrounded by this sort of sentiment, I started to believe a lie and even had swallowed it whole, only to realize later how wrong I was. I began to associate being "at home" as being a bad thing.

Sometimes I would be accused of being "at home" too much—often by a person who did not know me at all, but only knew that I homeschooled my children. I would often react defensively, describing the many activities we did as a family outside the home.

Understanding the Blessings of the Home

But, really, what is your home to you? Is it such an inadequate place to spend time?

Consider that Satan hates the family unit and wants to destroy families. We see in society his influence to separate family members. Strong families are the building blocks of a successful, long-lasting society (cf. Exodus 20:12). Problems often stem from broken families. No wonder Satan has declared war on happy, intact families, trying to tear them apart.

Against such an attack, the home can play an important role. A good home is the place where a healthy family can deepen its roots. God cares about it so much that He commands wives to be homemakers (Titus 2:5) to help ensure the home's health and stability. He even commanded

ancient Israel that a man with a new wife be "free at home one year"—without the usual societal burdens of serving in the army

and other business—to help set a loving foundation for a strong marriage (Deuteronomy 24:5).

Home is a place of protection, privacy, security, happiness, enjoyment, acceptance, and other blessings—where an eager mind can soak up knowledge and instruction. The home environment is a place where families can grow closer, read together, and discuss what's on everyone's minds. In healthy homes, God's word is read and talked about—in fact, in our changing society, the home is the one place we can most fully and openly teach about God in a safe, close-knit,

Being a homemaker and caring for my kids
has been **the most fulfilling job that I have
ever experienced. Literally nothing compares!**

family environment. Home is where family—and extended family—is truly cared for in piety (1 Timothy 5:4). At home, delectable meals are enjoyed together and there’s a continual building of harmony among those blessed to live there with each other.

Home will be where there is laughter while playing card games. Our homes (and the homes of others) are where friends are served and can enjoy meals together. Home is where out-of-town guests and family members come to visit. It is a sanctuary where families can rest, learn, and grow. Home is truly glorious!

The Lie Starts Early

I’ve been deceived in the past, as many others are, to believe that home is *not* the place for a mother to be—that being at home is shameful. I cannot even begin to list all the places I’ve picked up that notion, and it is apparently becoming ingrained very deeply in the various parts of our society.

For instance, I think back to when I was young and in school, where the idea of women being “in the home” was looked down upon. I was taught in the classroom that a woman’s place was *not* in the home, as if it was a degrading place to be. That message seeps deeply into our society.

Yet, being “in the home”—being a homemaker and caring for my kids—has been the most fulfilling job that I have ever experienced. Literally nothing compares—and that’s not to say it has been *easy*! Living on only one income can be a real challenge, and for some families it may be impossible in their current circumstances. Some single mothers have to work *two jobs* just to make ends meet. Those mothers who find that

they *must* work outside the home to help their family survive deserve praise, as well. And even when we can make it work with one income, we can find ourselves worrying that our children won’t “get enough.” (And some people will tell you that.) We all have to evaluate before God what our family is truly capable of achieving. But, sadly, our world doesn’t even present a one-income family with a stay-at-home mom as a real possibility for young women to consider and hope for. That is a tragedy.

In today’s society, it takes looking with the eyes of faith to see the profession of homemaker as one with superb rewards—a profession that is supremely valued by God!

Turning an Accusation into Praise

The reality is that our homes and our families are a blessing! They are a *good* thing! And being “keepers at home” (Titus 2:5, *KJV*)—wives and mothers who can pour their passions into taking a very active role in their children’s education, building their home, and strengthening family relations—is a wonderful opportunity.

To me, the scriptures make it clear that the next time I am accused of being “just at home” with my daughters, I should thank the person for noticing and take it as a compliment! Please do not believe the lie that being at home is shameful. When people note that *you* are at home part or a lot of the time, say “thank you.” After all, you are accomplishing much! We should learn to do that—to just say “thank you” and to be confident.

I’ve long seen myself as pro-God’s Word, pro-God’s Ways, pro-life and pro-family. And now, I’ve added *pro-home*. (L)



In Loving Memory

Mr. John MacKenzie of the Edmonton, Alberta congregation died on March 9 after decades of health issues resulting from a fall sustained while mountain climbing. He was **55**. Baptized in 1998, Mr. MacKenzie was cheerful despite his difficulties, encouraging the brethren by his example of tenacity and faithfulness to God. His character is best described by a statement made some years ago, “Even without legs, you stand tall.” He leaves behind his mother, Maureen, his brother, Robert, and the brethren in Alberta who look forward to seeing him again in the resurrection.

Mrs. Katholeen (Kae) Leeder of the Red Deer, Alberta congregation died peacefully on March 20 at the age of **99**. A member since 1969, she was a gentle and kind lady who will be missed by those who had the opportunity to know her. Mrs. Leeder was the mother of five, grandmother of 17, and had great-grandchildren as well. She was predeceased by her husband, William.

Mr. Gene “Dap” Parker, 76, of Dallas, Texas, and a longtime member of the Church of God, died on December 27, 2016. Mr. Parker is survived by his wife, Judy, of 34 years, as well as many other family and Church family members. He will be missed by all who knew and loved him. Pastor Gary Stein conducted his memorial service on December 31.

Mr. Christopher Sullins, affectionately known as “Unka Buddy,” of the Thomasville, Georgia congregation died in his sleep on March 5 at the age of **92**. Mr. Sullins was a U.S. Army veteran of WWII, a retired law enforcement officer with the state of Florida, and was baptized into God’s Church in 1971. He loved his family, his Church family, and also loved to fish. Survivors include his wife of 70 years, Mary Helen, two daughters, Christy Sullins and Donna Stitt, two grandchildren, four

great-grandchildren, two sisters, and many nieces, nephews, and other relatives. He was buried with military honors on March 12.

Ronald George Peterson fell asleep on December 28, 2016, and is awaiting the trumpet call of God and the resurrection at Christ’s return. He had been suffering from congestive heart failure and other illnesses for some years. He was born September 8, 1931 in Quincy, Illinois and was baptized in 1965 along with Jean Fountain Peterson, his wife of 65 years. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1949 and served aboard the USS Valley Forge aircraft carrier in the Korean War. He married his wife, Jean, while on home leave in the Navy in 1951. He and Jean have seven children—Rhonda Clore, Robin Morelli, Reginald Peterson (who died before Ron in July 2016), Rick Peterson, Teresa Westwood, Brenda Wendling, and Jeff Peterson—17 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren. He is also survived by a brother, Michael Peterson and his large family.

After the Navy, Mr. Peterson attended the Milwaukee Institute of Technology and founded several successful businesses in the Quincy, Illinois area. In the late 1950s and early 1960s he performed on WGEM, the Quincy TV channel and toured on the Possum Holler Opry circuit with Tex Ritter and Jimmy Dean. After moving to Florida in 1968, he continued the family auction business and operated Opportunities, Inc., a charity that helped students obtain scholarships for college.

Ron loved playing the piano and singing and passed his love for music on to his children. The Peterson family is known throughout the Church of God for their musical talents and service.

Births

Marshall and Nadia Moluf of the Dallas, Texas congregation were blessed with their third daughter, **Melody Elizabeth Moluf**, on March 3. She weighed 7 pounds and was 20.25 inches long. The family is thrilled to be halfway to an all-girls volleyball team!

Mr. and Mrs. Bradley (Karla) Blake of the Edmonton, Alberta congregation are delighted to announce the birth of their first child, **Laurie-Lynn Virtue Blake**, on March 7. She weighed 7 pounds, 6 ounces, and measured 21.5 inches long. The happy grandparents are Mr. Perry Blake of Edmonton, and Mr. and Mrs. Harold Bussey of the Springdale, Newfoundland congregation.

We want to hear more about milestones in the lives of our brethren. If your family has had a birth, marriage or major anniversary, please ask your local pastor to send word to the *Living Church News*, PO Box 3810, Charlotte, NC 28227-8010 (or to send e-mail to lcn@lcn.org).

Weddings & Anniversaries

On Thursday, 13 October, a most joyous occasion was celebrated in the warm South African bushveld. **Stefan van der Watt**, son of Ryan and Erica van der Watt from the Pretoria congregation, married **Rebekah Hernandez**, daughter of Ismael and Martha Hernandez from the Miami, Florida congregation. The ceremony was conducted by Mr. Lawdi Ferreira. Friends and family from all over the world came to rejoice with them amidst God's beautiful creation, with bushveld, wild animals and a picturesque sunset. The couple currently resides in Pretoria, South Africa, but plans on eventually settling in the USA.

ORDINATIONS

Mr. Akbar Ali and **Mr. Brent Mitchell** were ordained deacons on the Feast of Trumpets 2016 by Pastor Jonathan McNair. Mr. Ali serves in the Manhattan, New York congregation and Mr. Mitchell in the Cranford, New Jersey congregation.

Mr. Kelvin Harrison and his wife Neva were ordained deacon and deaconess on March 25 by Associate Pastor Irv

Woelfle. Mr. and Mrs. Harrison serve in the Peoria, Illinois congregation.

Mr. Randy Blackman was ordained a deacon on March 4 by Elders Brian Pomictier and Rodney Stream. Mr. Blackman serves in the Des Moines, Iowa congregation.

Mr. Raymond (Blackie) Waller and his wife Joan were ordained deacon

and deaconess on March 11, by Associate Pastor Irv Woelfle. Mr. and Mrs. Waller serve in the Dubuque, Iowa congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. J.R. (Carolyn) Wells were ordained deacon and deaconess on the Feast of Trumpets 2016 by Pastor Glen Harrison and Elders Curtis Lambright, Chip Wheelahan, Mickey Mayeaux and Ray Joffrion. Mr. and Mrs. Wells serve in the Baton Rouge, Louisiana congregation.

THE GREATEST GENERATION? continued from page 4

What we see today is the result of rejecting God. A debased mind is one void of judgment. The moral decline in our Western world is difficult to explain. It makes no sense! One is at a loss for words to discuss intelligently what we see. No vocabulary will do! No wonder we read about an angel placing a mark on the foreheads of those to be spared at the end of the age: "And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side. . . 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it'" (Ezekiel 9:3-4). While this speaks of Jerusalem, we must not forget that Jerusalem is symbolic of the house of Israel at the end (Ezekiel 4:1-3).

Praiseworthy, But All Too Human

Every generation has its moments of greatness or shame. Tom Brokaw's greatest generation certainly had its moments

of greatness. They were survivors and doers. Nothing lazy about them! Individually, many did a commendable job raising their children. I happen to be one of those children, and I have only admiration for the love, wisdom and balance my parents had in raising my sister and me. They were not perfect parents, but they were good parents. Sadly, speaking generationally rather than individually, that generation did not do so well. Their children, my generation, brought us a host of social ills. In them are the words of the Proverbs fulfilled: "There is a generation that curses its father, and does not bless its mother. There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness. There is a generation—oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, and whose fangs are like knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men" (Proverbs 30:11-14). Sadly, subsequent generations have done even worse.

The greatest generation? Perhaps not *quite* as great as we would like to remember them. ^{LN}

COMMENTARY

The Spirit of Pentecost

Do you feel the Spirit of God moving in your life? Can you be filled with the same Spirit of Pentecost as Christ's first disciples? Yes, you can!

The 50 days following Christ's crucifixion and resurrection had been an unforgettable time for His disciples. Their Teacher had come back from the dead after a brutal execution, and had taught them for 40 days. More than 500 at one time had seen Him (1 Corinthians 15:6). The disciples ate with Him, talked with Him and even touched the wounds where His body had been pierced.

But that was not all. After 40 dramatic days of instruction, the Savior ascended into the clouds, while His disciples watched with wonder and amazement. But He did not leave them alone—He promised to give them something that would empower them with spiritual vitality they had never before experienced (Luke 24:49).

The disciple Luke describes Christ's encouraging words. "And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'" (Acts 1:4–5).

What event was the risen Christ speaking of? What was this 'promise' to come? Most Bible students know the basic story, but many are not fully aware of the profound impact this momentous 50th day would have on the Church of God from that point forward. It was the day of Pentecost—the day of miracles—the day the New Testament Church began!

What happened on that amazing Day of Pentecost in 31AD? Luke records the day's events: "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1–4).

The beginning of the New Testament Church was characterized by astonishing sights and sounds. It was an awesome display of divine power, reminiscent of the awesome sights God had shown on the day He gave Moses the law on Mount Sinai (Hebrews 12:18–21). In fact, according to Jewish tradition, the law of God at Mount Sinai was given on the Day of Pentecost many centuries earlier!

But more important than the sights and sounds were the events that could not be seen or heard. These manifestations of God's majesty signaled the outpouring of the power of the universe—God's Spirit! The same power that ignited the sun and the stars—the power that formed and set the planets in motion—would now literally abide in human beings on Earth (John 14:17).

Is that same Spirit transforming you? Is it motivating you? Would you like to have more profound, personal change in your life? Would you like to have more evidence that you are being led by the Spirit of God? And would you like to be more personally involved in the Work Christ is doing today?

For an overview of God's Plan as revealed through the annual Holy Days, read our booklet, *The Holy Days: God's Master Plan*.

—Rod McNair