

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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What Does It Mean to “Avoid”?

Dear Brethren,

From time to time, the Church is required to “mark”—take note of—someone. We read of this in the Apostle Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth, composed under the inspiration of God near the Days of Unleavened Bread. Understanding the instructions given there is vital to our spiritual health.

As we all know, leavening puffs up bread dough, and Paul used this metaphor several times in the letter. He also spoke directly about how *spiritual leavening* was affecting some members in the congregation. His mention of members being “puffed up” included concern about how they were pitting one true minister against another. “Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be *puffed up* on behalf of one against the other” (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Paul’s next two uses of this expression describe some people’s attitude of smug self-confidence. “Now some are *puffed up*, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are *puffed up*, but the power” (vv. 18–19). It is evident from Paul’s letter that the Corinthian church had members lacking spiritual maturity and insight, and he pleaded with them to “imitate me” (v. 16), later adding the caveat, “just as I also imitate Christ” (11:1).

Love Does Not Excuse Sin

But all of this was leading up to another serious problem in Corinth. A man in the congregation was having an improper relationship with his stepmother, and members were not only untroubled by this, but taking pride in their attitudes of “love” and

“mercy.” “And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you” (5:2). What follows is a stinging rebuke. “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (vv. 4–5).

Paul reminded them that if they allowed the leaven of *sin* to remain in the Body of Christ, it would spread to others (v. 6). Paul understood that lawlessness leads to more lawlessness (Romans 6:19). The Corinthian brethren, instead of being appalled by this man’s behavior, were puffed up. But in what way?

Clearly, they felt righteously tolerant. I remember a similar congregation once tolerating a woman living with a man outside of marriage (and a non-believer, at that). Members thought, *She is so nice—she is just weak*. Unbelievably, this went on for several years! Members thought of themselves as kind, loving, and merciful, but this was not the approach Paul took, and neither should it be ours. This was not the first time Paul instructed Corinth on such matters. He refers to an earlier instruction:

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person (1 Corinthians 5:9–11).

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Whoever this sexually immoral man was, he was probably liked by many in the congregation. He probably had some good character traits. He may have had a good sense of humor and been fun to be around. Nevertheless, no matter how popular he might have been, what matters is that Paul, inspired by God, declared that there are more important things than close friendships. And his instructions to avoid sinners did not stop with the sexually immoral. In his epistle to the Romans he addressed the subject more broadly.

Now I urge you, brethren, **note** those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil (Romans 16:17–19).

The *King James Version* uses a similar word in verse 17, saying to “*mark* them which cause divisions.” Over the decades, we have used the term *mark* rather than *note*. *Mark* can but does not necessarily carry with it an emphasis on the Church’s responsibility to point out someone to avoid. Indeed, that is what Paul did with the fornicator in Corinth—but notice the context of Paul’s command to the Corinthians. Was he not telling them to do what they should have already done? Those in that congregation should have avoided the fornicator much earlier, and not waited for Paul to step in and correct them. That is clear from the whole context!

Prioritize Your Loyalty

In the case of Romans, Paul’s address is to the brethren—believers as a body. The *New King James Version* carries the sense of *taking note*. Paul mentions no one in particular—just to take note of anyone causing division and avoid them. Certainly, it is best for the Church to make that determination and make members aware when they might not fully understand something. But, as in Corinth, there is also personal re-

sponsibility placed on the membership. When you see someone who claims to be a brother or sister in Christ causing division or living an openly immoral life, *avoid that person*. God’s mind regarding divisive people is *not* obscure:

These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, *a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren* (Proverbs 6:16–19).

And remember what God tells us about rebellion and stubbornness: “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Samuel 15:23). If we understand these instructions, we realize that there are limits to friendship.

Jesus told His Apostles, “You are My friends *if* you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14). “A friend is a friend for life” is a sentiment that does not square with the Bible. The truth is that most friendships in this life are temporary. Circumstances and people change over time. Many close friends in the past are no longer close today, because they ceased sharing the interests and values that brought them together in the first place. Do we still remember them and care for them? Of course—but in the Church, we also recognize that basic question asked by the prophet Amos: “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” (Amos 3:3).

We should value friendship, but let us not allow our human reasoning and emotions to override important instructions from God. It is not a sin to have friends who have left our fellowship and see them at appropriate times—such as weddings, funerals, and other such events. But it can become a sin when we reject the biblical admonition to avoid those who live immoral lives or cause division. If you are a friend of God, you cannot be a friend of the world (James 4:4). Our loyalties must first and foremost be to our ultimate friend, Jesus Christ.



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EDITORIAL By Gerald E. Weston

Faith, Protection, and Unity!

What a year this has been! We would normally have this issue of the *Living Church News* filled with summer camp material, but, as you will see, that has been scaled back a bit. The Adventure Camp was a huge success, as was the West Virginia Preteen Camp, but we canceled two preteen camps in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak that occurred at our Texas Teen Camp. Some may wonder how this could happen at one of our camps; can we not expect God to give us supernatural protection? Let's see what we can learn from the Holy Scriptures.

God tells us through His servant the Apostle Peter, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12–13). Peter also tells us that the devil walks about seeking whom he may devour, and in the context of this passage, he says to know "that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world" (5:8–9). Peter also wrote, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6–7).

Some may say that this all happened because we lacked faith, or because God was in some way displeased with us. But can we name *any* group that has not been touched by this pandemic? Nothing in Scripture indicates that God's people will live a life free of harm. Yes, we know Psalm 91—but does it mean God will protect us from all dangers every time we, in effect, demand that He do so?

We read of many healings in the New Testament, but we also read of those who were *not* immediately healed. Many were healed through the Apostle Paul, yet we also read that one of his fellow workers in the Gospel was, quite literally, *deathly* ill: "Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow" (Philippians 2:25–27).

We also read of how God allowed Satan to thwart Paul's plans and even to afflict him in some way (1 Thessalonians 2:18; 2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul told the Romans that he had often tried to come to them but was hindered (Romans 1:9–13). He does not say *how* he was hindered, only that he was. We can also read of how the great archangel Gabriel was hindered from coming to Daniel for a period of three weeks (Daniel 10:12–13). And how can we forget what went on behind the scenes with Job? It would be foolish at best to characterize Epaphroditus, Paul, Job, or the archangel Gabriel as "lacking faith" because they experienced great illness or hardship. We do not currently understand all the reasons we had an outbreak of the coronavirus at our Texas Teen Camp—almost certainly the Delta variant that hit Texas hard at the beginning of July—but in time we will understand better why God allowed it.

Though we do not always know the mind of God at the time some event occurs, I have learned from many years of experience that God is often working out unforeseen plans for us. I am reminded of a story recently related to me by people to whom this happened. We held a Feast in India a couple of years ago, and all except one who requested a visa to enter India received one. This lady was turned down three times, and no one could understand why. She certainly doesn't look like or act like a terrorist, spy, or troublemaker.

One reason she wanted to go to India was to spend time with a friend, but that obviously did not happen. However, her brother received his visa and did something that all agree he would not have done had his sister been there—he spent time with his sister's friend. Now he and his sister's friend are married. Sometimes God works, as they say, in mysterious ways. Without going into details, I can look back on my life and see that events that were traumatic at the time worked for good in the end, and my guess is that most of you can look back and say the same.

We are physical beings, and summer camps are considered risky in the age of COVID-19. And of all types of camps, those like our Teen Camp are riskiest. We had about 240 campers and staff come from all over the country to a place where for two weeks they were to sleep in dorms and eat meals together, and they could not practice social distancing or masking in any practical way. We knew there was a risk, as all it would take would be one individual slipping through the cracks for the virus to spread like wildfire.

Addressing Questions

Some surely wonder, *Why didn't God prevent the outbreak?* He certainly could have. Are we lacking in faith? First of all, it should be recognized that we have been *transparent* and have not tried to “hide” by *not* testing for COVID-19 when sickness occurs. We have not concerned ourselves with what others will think—instead, we have focused on honesty and on being up-front. And contrary to what many may believe, the 2020 Texas Teen Camp was not “illness free,” as several who attended the camp have mentioned after the fact, including some who were, themselves, sick at camp. This is not unusual for any camp, of course, and shouldn't be considered remarkable. But it does help to put the claims of some last summer in perspective.

And this year, one particular group in which some have claimed great faith in God's protection from sickness also experienced issues with illness in their camp, in some cases severe. Months earlier, the same group had experienced an outbreak at another event, and before long several were hospitalized, including the group's leader.

I don't write these things to condemn anyone, but merely to state the facts and to note that these facts should put *shallow claims* about faith into perspective. Health challenges such as these should not be taken as signs that those who suffer should be judged as lacking in faith—whether those who suffer are in our group or in another. As I explained earlier, even some of the most faith-filled individuals in Scripture experienced sickness and calamity, and their faith was not shown in God's miraculous protection, but rather in their godly obedience, attitude, and even gratitude as they endured those trials.

Concerning those who have fallen ill, in our own organization and in others', we are grateful to God that most have recovered, and we grieve for those who did not—again, whether in our organization or even among those who have left us. Many of us have prayed for their welfare. As David wrote concerning some who had attacked him and acted as his enemies, giving us perspective and something to meditate upon,

Fierce witnesses rise up; they ask me things that I do not know. They reward me evil for good, to the sorrow of my soul. But as for me, *when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting*; and my prayer would return to my own heart. I paced about as though he were my friend or brother; I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns for his mother. But in my adversity they rejoiced and gathered together; attackers gathered against me, and I did not know it; they tore at me and did not cease; with ungodly mockers at feasts they gnashed at me with their teeth (Psalm 35:11–16).

David's words are consistent with Jesus Christ's command to each of us to “love your enemies, bless those who

curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). Dear brethren, we must follow God's inspired instructions—and that includes loving and praying for our enemies, even while they may despise us.

Walking in Love—and Wisdom

Yet, even as we follow God's instructions to love our enemies, we must *also* follow the instructions God gave through Paul to *avoid* those who cause division, as I explained in this issue's “Dear Brethren” letter beginning on page 1. Some don't seem to understand this individual responsibility and expect Headquarters to “mark” every single person who causes division, but are we not individually able to discern division when we see it? Are we so blind that we cannot make a simple judgment based on scriptural instruction? Are we unable to understand the meaning of “avoid”?

Does it make sense to believe and follow the reports of clearly divisive men? God hates division! I quoted Proverbs 6:16–19 in my “Dear Brethren” letter, and it is worth examining again. Notice the things that are listed along with divisive men—just as He hates those who sow discord, God says He hates “a false witness who speaks lies” (v. 19). I personally have been accused of “taking the Church into apostasy” as Mr. Tkach did. Brethren, are we not able to see how outright foolish such an accusation is? Where is the evidence? Have any of us in leadership positions hinted that we are not to observe the seventh-day Sabbath or the annual Festivals and Holy Days? Have we ever implied that we should stop distinguishing between clean and unclean meats? Have we gone against any of the 18 truths God restored to His Church through Mr. Herbert Armstrong? Have we neglected Christ's commission to take the Gospel to the world? You should know the answer to that.

The fact is that over the last two years, the Living Church of God has had to face circumstances and make decisions that neither Mr. Armstrong nor Dr. Meredith faced—just as they faced things in the past that we have not had to deal with. We have had to make decisions regarding whether to limit the sizes of our Festival sites, whether to require masks and social distancing, and whether to worship together online in some situations. It is interesting that splinter groups that have decried online services are now of necessity holding online services. Brethren, we ought to be able to recognize rumor-mongering lies when we see them. And, of course, true Christians do not listen to divisive people who try to paint every decision in a negative light. Instead, true Christians follow Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

Does this mean we have made perfect decisions over the last several years? Of course not! But how do our mistakes compare to that of the Church under Mr. Armstrong regarding the Day of Pentecost? Remember that for 40 years the Church always kept it on Monday. How to count the day was always controversial, but when Mr. Armstrong realized his error—the different way time was counted in Hebrew—he made the change that most of us take for granted today.

Yet, while God tells us through Paul that we are to avoid those who cause division, this does *not* mean that we do not pray for them when they get sick or that we fail to pray that they may see the error of their ways. We are happy when a neighbor, a coworker, or a member of virtually any group—even those who have criticized and derided our decisions and efforts—recovers from serious illness. After all, we too are physical, and we suffer the same trials as our fellow human beings. Our real enemy is Satan the devil, the great deceiver.

We are not the only ones who in the last two years have had to shut down a camp early or cancel a camp due to the novel coronavirus. Virtually all Church of God groups have had outbreaks of the coronavirus and other illnesses as a result of a camp, family weekend, funeral, Feast, or other activity. This is not to say that all Church of God groups are the same or that all are doing the will of God, which brings me to another point.

How Are We to View Others?

Some among us see the various Churches of God descended from Worldwide as “all believing the same thing.” But if that is the case, why have they divided the Church by rejecting Dr. Meredith, who with the founding of the Global Church of God in late 1992 was clearly doing the Work of God by preaching the Gospel to the world (Matthew 28:18–20), giving the Ezekiel warning message (Ezekiel 33:1–7), and feeding the flock (John 21:15–17)? Many who went a different direction freely admitted that Dr. Meredith was already doing these things when they left Worldwide. On the other hand, we have other members who mistakenly believe that anyone in a group outside the Living Church of God is an apostate.

I was recently asked for my thoughts regarding these other groups, and here is what I explained. Some organizations that call themselves “Church of God” are clearly *not* God’s Church in any way, although there may still be some of God’s people among them. These are often the ones led by a single authoritarian leader who takes advantage of people, pressuring people to donate homes or life-savings they may need themselves someday. They make wild and continual claims about when the tribulation begins and other outlandish prophetic utterances. Some forbid their members from fellowshiping or even associating with family members if they are not members of their group. It is difficult to see Christ’s leadership in these groups in any substantial way at all.

Then there are groups that splintered off from us, rebelling against the leadership of the Church under Mr. Armstrong, Dr. Meredith, or me, and these have essentially gone nowhere. God is not going to honor division. These do not normally reach out to the world in any significant way, but fish in the pond of God’s Church, thus further dividing the Body of Christ and diminishing its ability to do God’s Work. While some make more noise and last longer than others, they virtually all end up splintering further and failing to do the Work of God in any significant way.

There are other groups, larger than the ones I have just mentioned, that are similar to us in most doctrines, yet with important differences—especially in governance and focus. As I explained to the questioner, Jesus instructed us to judge by the fruits, and Paul added that it is unwise to compare ourselves among ourselves (2 Corinthians 10:12). Whatever God may choose to do through others is not our concern (Mark 9:38–40; Acts 19:13–17). We know who we are, and we know the commission Christ gave. That is where we should focus our minds. We must be humble enough to admit that we do not know how all of this will play out in the future. We hope that God will use us to finish His Work, but that is His decision. We must do what we know to do and let Him decide how He will use—or not use—any specific group.

Deceptive Movements

And that brings me to one final aspect I’d like to address concerning this whole matter. From time to time we see individuals who set themselves up to try vainly to bring all the “Church of God” groups back together. *If only the leaders would get out of the way, we could all be together*, they think. Rather than uniting people, these movements eventually separate people and further divide our efforts to do the Work of God. How often we see someone act as though only the “independent” can “serve the unserved.” How often we see unordained individuals attempt to bring groups together socially, as though that is the most important thing.

Brethren, do not get caught up in these movements. They will fail in the end, but in the meantime they further divide and distract people from doing the Work. We have a commission—let us not fail in fulfilling it!

As for camp, I am grateful to be able to say that, in the eyes of most who attended, the Texas Teen Camp was not a failure. Despite having to close so early, we still heard from several campers and staff that it was their best camp experience ever. We were able to work with our staff, including a newly formed group of “high school” staff who caught the vision of where we want to go. This was a good start for next year. Lessons to be learned from this year will become clearer as time goes by. Where the world will be next year, we cannot know, but whatever happens, we trust that Jesus Christ is in charge and that He is working out a plan that we will better understand in the years ahead. (L)



In Everything Give Thanks

By **Richard F. Ames**

As we in the United States prepare to celebrate our national Thanksgiving Day holiday on the fourth Thursday in November, we may remember that other nations have their own days of thanksgiving. In Canada, Thanksgiving Day falls on the second Monday of October—which means it sometimes occurs during the Feast of Tabernacles, giving Canadian brethren a sort of double reminder to be thankful. Canadians trace their nation's first Thanksgiving celebration to 1578, more than 40 years before the Pilgrims in Massachusetts. The Chinese nation, amazingly, has been keeping a national Thanksgiving Day for more than 2,000 years!

Christians need not hesitate to participate in godly observances of their nations' secular days of thanksgiving. Jesus Christ kept the Jews' national festival of Hanukkah, giving thanks for the Maccabees' miraculous stand against their Greek oppressors (John 10:22–23). But even though our nations may encourage us to be thankful, as Christians our more important concern is what the *Bible* tells us about thankfulness.

Don't Be Thankless

First, let's see what the Bible says about *un*-thankfulness. The Apostle Paul instructed the young evangelist Timothy about what people living in the end-times would be like:

[They] will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, **unthankful**, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (2 Timothy 3:2–5).

We are living in prophesied times of ingratitude. Paul warned about those who are unholy and unthankful. Christians, by contrast, are a thankful people. We appreciate God's love for humanity, and we are conscious of His grace, His love, and His mercy towards us. We need to have and exercise the

attitude of thanksgiving. It's an aspect of godly character and it's a continuous state of mind. Writing to the brethren in Rome, Paul warned:

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. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, **nor were thankful**, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened (Romans 1:18–21).

Notice the connection between recognizing God, glorifying Him, and being thankful. Those who stubbornly deny the evidence of a loving Creator persist in making themselves foolish, with darkened and unthankful hearts. The same applies to those who admit that there is a God but refuse to glorify Him. But if we recognize God's handiwork all around us, we have constant reasons to be thankful, even in the midst of trials.

In All Circumstances

In the *New King James Version* of the Bible, the word *thanks* occurs 71 times; the word *thanksgiving* occurs 31 times. It is a recurring theme throughout Scripture. Paul gave this command to the Thessalonian brethren: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, **in everything give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18). Can you give thanks in *everything*?

One scripture that is difficult for many to follow is James' well-known admonition: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (James 1:2). How can a trial be joyful? It can seem almost callous to think of telling brethren to be joyful when they are suffering. But why does James give us this instruction? He wrote this "knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (v. 3).

Yes, even in times of great trial, we should be thankful that God is working with us to produce in us His holy and righteous character, which will endure long after every trial has passed. But what about situations where something truly evil and awful is occurring? One Bible commentary reminds us, “We cannot of course thank God ‘for all circumstances,’ including those which are evil and displeasing to him; but we can and should thank him *in all circumstances* or ‘whatever happens’” (John Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians*, 1991). We don’t thank God for what is sinful, but amid a sinful world we can and must still thank Him for all that He does for us—even in the midst of troubles.

Our thankfulness is a recognition of the reality of God as the source of every blessing, every good and perfect gift that comes down from the Father of lights. God’s wrath is against those who refuse to acknowledge that He is the source of life and breath and the way to happiness and abundant life. James also reminded us, “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights” (James 1:16–17).

Thankfulness in Christ

Paul wrote these inspiring words to the Ephesian brethren: “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, *giving thanks always for all things* to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:18–21).

Think about Paul and Silas, put in prison with their feet fastened in stocks. What did they do? “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25). Even *before* a miraculous earthquake led to their escape (v. 26), they were praising God and giving thanks! They were living by a principle Paul shared with the Colossian brethren: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17). That should be our pervasive attitude—“24/7,” as they say. Also, remember that “name” doesn’t just refer to what you call someone. When you act “in the name of” your Savior, you are acting under His authority. You are acting within His will, not rebelling against it. And if you are living under Jesus’ authority, you can be thankful for that—and for everything coming from that!

Like Paul and Silas, we should abound in our faith with thanksgiving! As Paul reminded the Colossian brethren, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, *abounding in it with thanksgiving*” (Colossians 2:6–7).

Thankfulness in Prayer

But what should you do if you have a trial or an unmet need? Should you worry? No! Scripture tells us, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7).

And Jesus Christ is our High Priest. What does that mean?

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14–16).

Jesus Christ is there to help us find mercy and grace. He is our Intercessor. And we don’t need to be shy in asking for His intercession—we are to come boldly before the throne!

Yes, we should pray *boldly* for our concerns and our needs. And we should pray not with anxiety, but rather with thanksgiving! A trial may bring us very real suffering, but our faith in the midst of the trial should give us the strength to endure—and not just to endure, but also to thank God for everything He does for us and gives to us! One of our ministerial widows made a practice of almost every day writing down five things for which she could be grateful. She started doing that when she heard the suggestion in one of my sermons many years ago. She eventually wrote down more than 39,000 things for which to be grateful and is continuing the practice daily. What a powerful way to maintain a positive mind even in times of trial!

As an aside, Paul’s admonition to the Philippians may call to mind an important and helpful booklet, *The Seven Laws of Radiant Health*, written many years ago by Dr. Roderick C. Meredith. One of those laws, which really makes possible the other six, is *Maintain a positive and tranquil mind*. That’s not always easy, and I have to admit that I still work on it regularly. One of the lessons I’ve written to myself in my little lesson book is *Be cool at all times*. That’s a choice—and we can *choose* to be thankful even when we are tempted by worry and ungratefulness. Of course, we must also be *passionate* about God’s way of life!

Thankfulness for Correction

Most of us want to learn as much as we can the easy way—the spiritual way—by prayer, study, fasting, and meditation. But sometimes we may have a character flaw that, because

of our weakness or unawareness, may only be overcome with God's loving correction. It may be hard, but we need to thank God for such correction. We read, "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives'" (Hebrews 12:5-6).

Yes, we can ask God to correct us gently, in His mercy. But even His loving and gentle correction may hurt us for a while. It takes strength of character to give God the thanks He deserves for giving us the correction we need.

And it may take some of us years to accept the most difficult correction of our deepest flaws and weaknesses. Our Savior lived a perfect human life for more than 33 years, and some of us need much longer than that to become teachable in some areas of our lives. It has taken me 50 years or more to learn some lessons, and I know I have more yet to learn. So, I need to maintain a teachable attitude so I can learn from the remaining years God gives me. I am thankful when I'm able to learn a lesson through prayer and meditation, but sometimes I need to learn a painful lesson through experience—and part of that lesson is to be thankful, despite the pain, knowing that God is correcting me in love.

Christ's Own Example

Throughout His ministry on earth, Jesus Christ was not always welcomed. He was persecuted, reviled, and eventually killed by His enemies. Yet He remained thankful. After lamenting how the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida had rejected His message, He still kept the "big picture" in mind and remained grateful. We read, "At that time Jesus answered and said, 'I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight'" (Matthew 11:25-26).

Christ thanked His Father for revealing to His disciples understanding, truth, the Way of life, the revelation of what's right and wrong, the Way of love, the Way of the Ten Commandments, and our very purpose—that we can be born into His Family. And, if we want to consider an example of remaining thankful in trials, let's remember that Christ showed us an amazing attitude of thanksgiving at His final Passover meal: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, **and gave thanks**, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'" (Matthew 26:26-28). Could we remain thankful like that, even knowing we would soon be put to death? I hope so—and we have the best example of all in our Savior!

Respond with Genuine Thanks

Sadly, not everyone Christ encountered gave Him the thanks He deserved. Notice how ten lepers reacted after Jesus healed them: "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?'" (Luke 17:15-17). We must be that one, not one of the nine who were ungrateful and refused or didn't bother to give thanks to their Healer.

Of course, there is also a kind of "false thanks" that is really an expression of vanity, not humility and gratitude. Consider the gospel account of the Pharisee and the tax collector coming to the temple to pray.

"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:11-14).

Does this apply to any of us? We should be thankful for our calling always, but if we let ourselves think that because of our calling we are "better" than others around us, we are just like that Pharisee. We have received the indescribably wonderful gift of our calling, which should fill us with humility and thankfulness—not with pride, self-righteousness, and a false sense of superiority.

Reasons to Be Thankful

Yes, our calling and our salvation are the greatest reasons for us to give thanks. But if we take time to think about it, we can find an almost unending list of reasons to be thankful, like the list that I mentioned earlier. You might not have 39,000 items on your list just yet, but consider that many of us live in nations that God blessed mightily in the past, and that still retain many blessings unknown to poorer countries. Many of us have almost complete freedom to worship, unlike some of our brethren in repressive nations where religious minorities face brutal repression or even death. We aren't facing the dangers that were experienced constantly by those who have fled Syria, or Afghanistan, or other failed states. Most of us are blessed with access to healthful food and clean water. For many of us, our air is cleaner than it was a generation ago.



Don't forget the simple blessing of a sunny day, for example. Many older brethren may remember a popular song from the 1950s, "The Best Things in Life Are Free." It reminded us:

*The moon belongs to everyone and the best things in life are free.
The stars belong to everyone; they gleam there for you and me.
The flowers in spring, the robins that sing, the sunbeams that shine;
They're yours, they're mine.
And love can come to everyone; the best things in life are free.*

On one level, it's just an upbeat, popular song. But we in God's Church understand that soon the moon and the stars *will* literally belong to us—we have a destiny in eternity that few today can even begin to understand! Yet the greatest gift of all is God's gift of salvation—a free gift that we dare not throw away through ingratitude, and a gift through which He promises to build within us His holy and righteous character.

God's character, nature, power, and glory are revealed in His word:

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (Revelation 4:9–11).

Yes, there is thanksgiving always at the throne of God.

Do you thank God for His Church? Paul's epistles are filled with expressions of thanks for the various congregations to which he wrote (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:4; Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2–3; 2 Thessalonians 1:3). With the coronavirus pandemic lockdowns, I hope that most of you reading this article have gained an even greater appreciation for your local Church congregation and what our scattered and

homebound brethren are missing because of their circumstances.

Express Your Thanks

As you know, I like to write poems from time to time, and this is one I wrote a decade ago, in 2011. It's another way of expressing thanks. I call this poem "Another Prayer of Thanks."

*Thank you for the wind and rain; thank you for the hills and plain.
Thank you for the sky above; thank you for eternal love.
Thank you for the coming King; to Him we pray, we love and sing.
Thank you for the words You say, the world at peace in Your great day.*

I like to encourage our brethren to express themselves creatively, even with poems like this one. But most importantly, I urge all you readers to express your thanks to God through your transformed life. Thank one another for kindnesses. Thank God throughout each day. Always use the expression *Thank you*. In our household, my wife and I say, "Thank you" several times a day. It helps our communication and our relationship.

And don't forget to thank God for your calling—a blessing given to very few in this present age (1 Corinthians 1:26–31). Thank God for giving you a part in His Work. Thank God for blessing His Work, and thank God for His revelation, His grace, and the very sacrifice of Christ. Let's go forward to fulfill our purpose and our mission with thanks for God's continual guidance and blessings. May we always abound in thanksgiving. May we always exemplify an attitude of gratitude and in everything give thanks. (LN)



Is God Fair?

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

Years ago, I knew a man who would call from time to time to tell me about his latest doctrinal ideas. He had attended a congregation I had pastored, but he had left to begin attending with various other, smaller groups. Sometimes I was interested in what was going on in them, so I would listen for a while when he would reach out to me.

He once mentioned that he had enjoyed a sermon that the pastor of one of those little groups had given, which had asked the question *Is God unfair?* The speaker had concluded that *God isn't fair, but it's okay that He isn't fair.* The speaker had mentioned the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard as an example of God's "acceptable unfairness."

Is God Unfair?

In fact, the pastor's conclusion was in error, because—according to the Bible—his *question* was in error. The Bible presents us with a different question, one that shows us an important lesson that Christ was teaching about the Kingdom of God.

Fairness is a human perception, usually about one person having more than another. Perceptions of fairness can be subjective, and examples of unfairness abound. Kids often complain, "Not fair!" when one gets something that another doesn't. Politicians often argue about fairness in taxation and distribution of benefits, and fairness can be a major political issue. As life goes on, time and chance just keep happening, so "Life is unfair" is a common expression.

One person may be affluent, while another struggles financially. One may be chronically sick, while another enjoys radiant health. Sometimes it all seems *so unfair*. But notice that when people point out unfairness, they usually have their personal interests primarily in view.

The Right Question

Since there is so much unfairness in life, people sometimes ask whether *God* is unfair, and the question of fairness can come up from reading some of Christ's parables. But the Bible implies a different question: *Is God just and is God good?* Justice and fairness are not necessarily always the same.

The Bible reveals that "*righteousness and justice* are the foundation of Your throne; *mercy and truth* go before Your face" (Psalm 89:14). The foundation of God's throne, which is the seat of His government, exists that way for a reason. The Bible also notes that "all Your commandments are righteousness" (Psalm 119:172), and God administers His divine law with perfect justice, which upon repentance includes mercy. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is always right and always just, and His word is truth (John 17:17). That is why *righteousness and justice* constitute the *foundation* of His throne and *mercy and truth* go before His face.

Christ said that Satan has a kingdom (Luke 11:16–18) and inspired Paul to write that Satan is "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Currently, the god of this age rules the world with strife, misery, and injustice. God allows this for now, but things will change dramatically when Satan is bound for a thousand years (Revelation 20:2). God's Kingdom will be established:

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2–3).

This will be done in righteousness and justice, and all nations will flow to God's mountain for that reason.

In one parable in particular, Jesus showed us that *God, in doing what is just and good, is never unfair*. In the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16), a landowner hired workers for his vineyard, promising them one denarius a day. But during the day, he hired more workers, some at the third hour, some at the sixth hour, and some at the ninth hour, and said to each that “whatever is right, I will give you (v. 4).

“And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive’” (vv. 6–7).

When the day's work was done, the landowner gave each man a denarius, and the men who had worked longest thought the equal wage was unfair.

“And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’ But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way.

Some reading this parable may agree with the workers that the landowner was unfair, but Jesus explains otherwise. All the workers got what they had agreed to work for—which was just. Certainly, even for those who had labored little, the employer had the right to do with his money what he willed. **It was not unjust for him to do good with it if he chose to do so.**

I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’ So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen” (vv. 11–16).

Some reading this parable may agree with the workers that the landowner was unfair, but Jesus explains otherwise. All the workers got what they had agreed to work for—which was *just*. Certainly, even for those who had labored little, the

employer had the right to do with his money what he willed. It was not unjust for him to do good with it if he chose to do so.

Each worker needed a full day's wages to live. One hour prorated to 1/12th of a denarius was not enough to get by on. Those later workers might have gone hungry that night, so the righteous and kind landowner gave each worker *what he needed to live*. That seemed *unfair* to some—but, in reality, it was *righteous* and *good*.

Back to verse 15: “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? **Or is your eye evil [seeing unfairness] because I am good [being compassionate]?**” The just landowner in this parable rightly rejected as self-serving the claims of unfairness by some of the workers. Today, too, some claims of unfairness are self-serving in nature. The landowner was both just and good, but some who didn't understand his righteous purpose perceived him as acting unfairly. Jesus' parable reveals the jealous workers as having neither the standing nor the competence to judge this righteous man.

Here Is Jesus' Point

So it is with our salvation. Just as each worker in the parable needed a full denarius for his livelihood, we all need the gift of eternal life. We don't earn it or deserve it—and some may work “in the fields” longer than others. Many brethren have labored most of their lives in God's fields, while some members may have been baptized only recently. But we all need God's great unearned gift if we are going to live. Whether we work a long or short time, nothing we do can earn that everlasting life.

And remember that besides being *just*, God is *good*. His justice is always righteous, and He uses justice to do good!

God reveals this about Himself: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9). Also, “His understanding is unsearchable” (Isaiah 40:28). Remember that

God's understanding is infinitely higher than ours, and He makes all things work together for the benefit of those who love and obey Him (Romans 8:28).

In summary, those who ask, “Is God unfair?” put themselves in the position of judging God—and self-serving humanity has neither the competence nor the standing to judge God! The Bible responds that God is both *just* and *good*. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.

God is good, and we can all trust in His justice and righteousness. (LN)

A Life Without God



By **Anthony Stroud**

My wife and I have been going through the book of Judges, in which we read, “Yet you have *forsaken* Me and served other gods. *Therefore I will deliver you no more.* Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let *them* deliver you in your time of distress” (Judges 10:13–14). This verse stood out vividly in my mind earlier this year, when on Tuesday, May 4, severe storms swept through our home city of Clanton and the surrounding areas, wreaking havoc and devastating people’s lives.

I have lived in the state of Alabama for several years and have seen several major storms sweep through it, noticing that the number and *severity* of these storms seem to have increased in the last year or two. One particular storm that hit Clanton will be etched in my mind for years to come. When we first heard the forecasts, my family and I did not think this storm would be as bad as it became, so we did not leave home—we were in for quite a surprise.

As the storm came on, I remember worrying about what was happening, wondering why the wind was blowing in such an unusual way. Going outside, I noticed the darkest clouds I had ever seen—and the clouds just kept getting darker, which prompted me to begin asking God to intervene, because at that time there was no doubt in my mind that a tornado appeared to be forming right before my eyes.

To say that I was beginning to grow nervous is an understatement. I believe that, after I prayed to our Father in heaven, He immediately intervened, as the clouds split apart and things began to brighten up. We did, however, get plenty of rain and wind, and probably some hail.

Storm after storm has come through Alabama, with Jemison—about 15 minutes from our home—hit the hardest. On one occasion, I saw that a tree had fallen through a

house—thankfully, it seems no one was hurt. When things of this magnitude happen, we as God’s people can’t help but think about prophecy and the need to trust Him.

A Timely Reminder

The storm my family and I experienced on May 4, combined with our study on the book of Judges revealing the attitude and behavior of the ancient Israelites, caused me to think deeply about the mindset of our nations today. Do we truly comprehend the strong words God declared to the Israelites in Judges 10? “*Therefore I will deliver you no more*” (v. 13).

While the storm raged more and more, I continued to pray and ask God for His mercy, and I thought, *I don’t know how anyone can survive in this world without God. A life without God is no life at all.*

In other areas around the country and around the world, devastation has struck, and some have even questioned whether there *is* a God. I even recall one Roman Catholic leader wondering aloud, *Where is God?* He should have read the Apostle Paul’s admonition; humanity is *without excuse* because creation reveals the existence of an incredibly *powerful* God whose wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Romans 1:18–20). Disobedience to God and His word, laws, and commandments will have painful consequences on our nations in a way that many will not be able to handle—a time of trouble that will horrify people around the world.

Will our nations heed the warnings God is sending, or will they foolishly continue the ungodly actions that will consistently bring God’s wrath? Proverbs 28:9 helps us to understand how serious it is to turn deaf ears to the laws of God, and to realize that the prayers of those who do so are an *abomination* to Him. Jesus Christ Himself warned that, as we draw closer to the end of society as we know it, man-

kind's love for one another will grow *cold* because of lawlessness (Matthew 24:12).

A Warning to Laodiceans

What about the saints? Should the people of God be concerned? The answer, as we all know, is an emphatic "Yes!"

There is a danger even God's people must be aware of, knowing that we are living in the last Church era, Laodicea, at the end of this age. We must never assume that the society in which we live cannot affect us, because it can and *does* influence all of us to some degree. We know that the Laodicean mindset irritates God to nausea, and Revelation 3:20 is a verse we all must take to heart: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

How is it possible that Christians can shut Christ out of their lives, leaving Him knocking at the door, desiring to come in and dine with them? This is a serious matter—Revelation 12:17 reveals that some of God's people will have to face great tribulation at the end of this age.

An examination of Matthew 24 reveals what will occur at the end of this age as the return of Christ draws near: religious deception; wars; rumors of wars; famines; pestilences; nations and peoples striving against each other over race, politics, and resources—and Jesus calls these just the *beginning* of sorrows. Luke 21:25 adds *distress*—anxiety or anguish—of nations, seas and waves roaring, and men's

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hearts failing them from *fear* as the powers of heaven are shaken. The way the winds were blowing here on May 4 would put fear in anyone, especially those who live *a life without God*.

Should God hear the prayers of anyone who lives contrary to His laws and worships idols? Consider how God told Israel, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 20:2)—He was the One who dealt with Pharaoh and his army, who fed and protected the ancient Israelites. And has He done any less for us?

We must understand that God ultimately has control over everything, including the weather. Amos 4:7 proves it: "I [God] withheld rain from you.... I made it rain on one city,

I withheld rain from another city." Even if no one else knows God's laws, the saints know them, and must never fall victim to the ways of this society and be led into disobeying those laws.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 6:17–18 to come *out* from among this society so we can be the sons and daughters of God. The reality that He will be a Father to us is *awesome*. What a wonderful blessing for those who obey these instructions!

God warns, "When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, *I will not hear*. Your hands are full of blood" (Isaiah 1:15). This sounds like something God is saying to the United States and to many other nations of this world, whose sins are bringing serious consequences. The book of Isaiah also tells us why human beings won't find the way of peace; sin has caused a separation from God (Isaiah 59:2–8).

A Need to Submit to God

The storms of May 4 may not have been the worst we have seen, but that day definitely helped me understand that a life without God is a life without *hope*. If we do not learn to obey God, what hope do we have? The people of God are so blessed to be able to cry out to Him and have Him respond in a special way—and, as time moves forward, we will *need* to cry out to God more often.

However, we must not wait until tragedy strikes. We must begin now to cry out more and more to Him in great *thanksgiving*, because the greatest blessing of all is being called, forgiven, and granted the Holy Spirit. That Spirit is our helper to draw us into an intimate relationship with our loving Father and Creator.

Now, while the seas are still relatively calm, is the time to cry out to Him—because it won't always be this way.

James tells us to *submit* to God, *resist* the devil, *draw near* to God, and *clean up* our lives as we draw closer to the end of man's reign under the evil influence of Satan (James 4:7–8). Peter tells us not to think it strange when *fiery trials* come, to *rejoice*, to *humble* ourselves, to be *sober* and *vigilant*, and to *resist* Satan and the pulls of his evil society (1 Peter 4:12–13; 5:6–9). Now is the time to establish a strong relationship with God, to *watch* and *pray* always (Luke 21:34–36), and to *persevere* (Revelation 3:10), because the days we live in are evil and trials of various sorts are upon us—and will continue.

May God help us to appreciate Him and His blessings and understand that now is the time to pray, that we may be able to stand in the days of trials and evil. May we all recognize how important it is to pray fervently, learning to trust in Him (Proverbs 3:5–7). (LN)



Christian Pilgrims

By Wyatt Ciesielka

There is a word often associated with the American holiday of Thanksgiving that God inspired the authors of the Bible to use to describe His saints. David used it in 1 Chronicles 29:12–15 when he praised God for His blessings and lovingkindness upon ancient Israel. In Hebrews 11:13, we see it used describing those great Old Testament men and women of faith who “all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them.” The Apostle Peter also used this word to address the Israelites who had been dispersed throughout the Roman Empire (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11). What is this word—and, more importantly, what is its relevance to Christians today?

Both the Hebrew word in the Old Testament and the Greek word in the New Testament may be translated as *exiles*, *sojourners*, or *pilgrims*—and the word has been applied to God’s saints through the ages. Additionally, through reviewing some of the events leading up to the first Thanksgiving in America some 400 years ago, we will see that there are indeed some *extremely relevant lessons* for “Christian pilgrims” today.

Pilgrims and the First American Thanksgiving

Once familiar to most American schoolchildren, the history of the *Mayflower* and the first Thanksgiving has become increasingly assailed, ridiculed, and abandoned. It is, of course, a story of imperfect human beings—but, contrary to attacks made by revisionist historians, it is *also* a story of hope, perseverance, sacrifice, and divine intervention.

In November 1620, the battered ship named *Mayflower* arrived in the cold waters off Cape Cod in what would later become the state of Massachusetts. The *Mayflower* normally carried cargo, but in 1620 it carried 102 passengers, many

fleeing severe religious persecution in England. These were the original American pilgrims who became known as the nation’s “Pilgrim Fathers,” as Daniel Webster aptly termed them.

The Pilgrims were not the first European settlers in America, but they were different. These people did not come to seek wealth. They were settlers, families, and religious refugees. They were men and women of *vision*, seeking escape from religious persecution. They were men and women of *courage*, willing to leave all behind to brave the ocean and settle in a wild, new world. And they were men and women of *character* with the tenacity to persevere and to overcome. In addition, they were not ignorant or uneducated people. In their brief charter, the Mayflower Compact, they established principles of governance that would later become incorporated into the United States’ Declaration of Independence and Constitution—principles of the rule of law, equality, and faith in God.

The Pilgrims’ first winter was infamously difficult. Only 53 of the original 102 passengers survived the cold, starvation, and disease of that first brutal winter. According to their journals, sickness and malnourishment so weakened the group that there were seldom more than five or six strong enough to care for the others at any given time. They would all likely have perished had it not been for God’s mercy, accomplished through the arrival of Samoset, the famous Native American who in March 1621 walked alone into the Pilgrims’ camp. He had previously learned English while working with English fishermen off the Atlantic coast. Soon after, Samoset brought Squanto, who spoke even better English, and then Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoag tribe.

With the help of their new, native friends, the beleaguered Pilgrim colony survived its first winter. They learned how to farm and hunt the local area. And, in the fall of 1621, the Pilgrims shared their bountiful harvest with their na-

tive friends—a three-day feast that was the first American “Thanksgiving.” They had endured much, but they were thankful for God’s providence. They were thankful for escaping religious tyranny, they were thankful for surviving their first winter, and they were thankful for the friendship of the local Wampanoag people. This was no temporary or passing friendship; the Wampanoag tribe and the Pilgrims established a friendship and peace that lasted for more than 50 years.

Lessons for Christian Pilgrims

The American Pilgrims had vision, which true Christians must also have in an *even more* profound way. Vision is what gives Christians the motivation to leave behind their old lives. Even through trials, vision convicts Christians that their “salvation is coming,” and that “His reward is with Him” (Isaiah 62:11). Vision convicts pilgrim Christians of the truth of Christ’s words, “He should give eternal life to as many as You [the Father] have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:2–3).

This thankful vision is fueled by the knowledge that it is the God who called them who made possible their deliverance (John 6:44) and that Jesus Christ offered redemption

The American Pilgrims had vision, which true Christians must also have in an even more profound way. **Vision is what gives Christians the motivation to leave behind their old lives.**

from their bondage (Galatians 4:4–5). Because of this vision, true Christians will develop deep *faith and courage*. The Old Testament men and women had *vision* to look for what is still ahead (Hebrews 11). And, like those examples of old, Christian pilgrims today combine vision with faith and courage. Like Paul, they “press on” that they “may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me,” being confident in “the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12–14).

Like the saints of old, and like the American Pilgrims 400 years ago, Christians are also people of *endurance*. Christians understand that through many trials and tribulations they will attain the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22), and that ultimately God will deliver the righteous from affliction (Psalm 34:19). Christians endure tests and trials; they understand that they are “blessed who endure” (James 5:11). Driven by vision, and full of faith and courage, true Christians *will* endure. They seek strength from “the everlasting God, the LORD, the

Creator of the ends of the earth, [who] neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength” (Isaiah 40:28–29). Christian pilgrims are men and women of *endurance*, the word used in many English-language translations of Revelation 14:12. As the *English Standard Version* translation states, “Here is a call for *the endurance of the saints*, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.”

Finally, the American Pilgrims were famously *conscious and appreciative* of the blessings they had received. After braving the ocean and surviving their first winter in a new land, these men and women who had sought freedom from religious persecution and who had attempted to live in peace with their new, native neighbors were *profoundly thankful*—they had deep appreciation for the relief God gave them, and acted on that thankfulness, sharing their bounty with their Native American friends and praising God for His deliverance.

True Christians have much to be thankful for. As Mr. Richard Ames wrote:

We thank God for the sacrifice of His Son to pay for our sins. We are thankful for God’s forgiveness and grace. Remember, Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). We are thankful for the gift of the Holy Spirit after repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). We are thankful not only for the sacrifice of Christ, but that He is alive as our High Priest, Savior and Intercessor! (“Thanksgiving and Our National Purpose,” *Tomorrow’s World*, November–December 2008).

Christian pilgrims are thankful for God’s calling and for Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. Even when enduring severe trials, and even more than the American Pilgrims, Christian pilgrims will be “thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18, *New Living Translation*). Christian pilgrims are thankful for the promise of Christ’s return (John 14:3). They are thankful that He will desire the work of His hands (Job 14:15), and they are thankful that He will bring His reward with Him (Revelation 22:12).

Four hundred years after the first American Thanksgiving, the Pilgrims’ example should be instructive for us today. Like the saints of old, even in times of increasing distress, Christian pilgrims combine *vision, faith, courage, and endurance with thankfulness* as they look for Christ’s return and as they claim the promise that their redemption draws near (Luke 21:28)! ^(LN)

Woman to Woman

Ladies Beware

By **Janth B. English**

A few years ago, when I heard a sermon by Dr. Scott Winnail entitled “Raising Daughters, Raising Godly Women,” I was shocked by my reaction to a statement he made. I consider myself a Christian woman who wants to please God, yet I bristled when he said, “*Avoid the mistake of telling your daughters and granddaughters that they can be anything they want to be.*” In my heart I knew he was right, so why did I have negative feelings about women having any limitations on their career goals? Had I unwittingly bought into some of modern society’s ideas about women? Had I been deceived?

Woman at Work

I was raised by my mother, a single parent of six children; she passed on to me a desire to succeed. As the oldest child and the first in my family of aunts, uncles, and cousins to go to college, I felt the need to do well. I studied hard and completed my college degree with honors. With degree in hand, I felt like the sky was the limit. I wanted all the things society had promised me in return for my hard work—career, money, and position. I also had a family. I thought I could have it all. But my marriage did not last, and then I was a single parent. I rose to middle management in a Fortune 500 company, which I thought was not too shabby for a poor girl from the projects. From time to time I had thought about what careers were appropriate for women, but I thought that Christian women were to reject only the careers that required great physical strength. After all, had not God made men and women equal in intellect?

Dr. Winnail’s statement caused me to reevaluate my attitude about society’s values with respect to women and their goals and expectations. I had been a member of God’s Church for more than 40 years when I heard this sermon, yet I had to conclude that I had nevertheless been deceived. I had not recognized the impact this society had made on my ideas about godly roles for women. It is important that we as Christian women examine some of our attitudes toward societal norms and beware of falling into this trap. Be forewarned that this article may offend you, just as I was initially offended when I heard this aspect of God’s truth.

One value that has become normal in Western society is that of women working outside the home. This transition has happened within my lifetime. “Among married couple families, two-thirds of mothers are employed (67.3 percent)” (“Breadwinning Mothers Continue to Be the US Norm,” *AmericanProgress.org*, May 10, 2019). Not only are women working in greater numbers; they are also working longer hours and taking positions previously reserved for men. Most women, like society in general, consider this to be progress.

But how about us? Do we, as Christian women, think it is good when we see women in these “progressive” roles? What is our reaction when we see groundbreaking feats accomplished by the female scientists at the forefront of COVID-19 research? Do we feel that women are making a lot of progress? Are we “adjusting” our thinking to conform to the way the world sees these things?

One effect of women working outside the home is that more women have a source of income independent of their husband’s. While more money coming into the home can have its benefits, it can also be a source of tension. Wives may begin to “assert their independence” and want to be the one to determine how funds are allocated. This brings into question who is in charge. Some say the patriarchal system is inherently abusive and unfair to women and should be thrown out. They use as examples women who have been abused, beaten, or even murdered by their husbands. Clearly, no woman—or man—should remain in a situation that is dangerous or harmful. However, these examples, which do not represent the experience of most women, are deceptively used to incite women’s emotions against male leadership. As a Christian woman, you may feel that you are not trying to be independent of your husband, but do you feel you need to lay aside a secret stash of cash “just in case”? Do you truly *desire* to have a man rule over you? Western society promotes women’s preeminence, self-sufficiency, and independence—but what does God say?

What Does the Bible Really Teach?

Most likely, the women reading this article are aware of God’s purpose for women and agree with it, at least in theory. God made women to assist their husbands as helpers (Genesis 2:18). God has placed men in charge of their families and



women are to submit to their husbands' leadership (Ephesians 5:22–28; 1 Timothy 3:4–5). If God designed the family such that the husband is in charge, should not we as women embrace this concept? Christian women offer counsel as part of the decision-making process, but they should not try to manipulate, denigrate, or otherwise undermine a husband's decisions in order to get their own way, even if they feel that they know best. We submit *ourselves* to our husbands. We must *choose* to follow the government God placed in the home so that we can reap the blessings His way brings.

Contrary to what Western society advocates, God has not designed women to be self-sufficient and financially independent. God wants men to provide for their households and support their wives (1 Timothy 5:8). His ideal is for women to be homemakers and manage their households (Titus 2:4–5).

Let us be clear; it is not necessarily wrong for women to work outside the home. We have the example of Lydia, who was an exporter of purple fabrics (Acts 16:14). We have scriptures describing a virtuous woman who has entrepreneurial skills that she uses to benefit her household (Proverbs 31:10–31). We also notice from these scriptures that a woman's home and family are featured as the most important elements in her endeavors; the bigger issue is women working outside the home in jobs that detract from the well-being of the family when it is not essential that they do so.

We live in Satan's society, and many women—especially single parents—find it necessary to earn wages. As a single parent, I used my skills and knowledge to provide for my children, and I know there are others who find themselves in the same situation. God will help you just as He helped me. Remember, He is a Father to the fatherless (Psalm 68:5) and He has compassion on women who have no one to take care of them (Luke 7:12–15). Single women with underage children carry a big burden, being both mother and breadwinner. It is a tiring sit-

uation in which many things either go undone or are lacking; I know this from experience. Others of us can show empathy and lighten their burden in small ways, such as baking a casserole to share, transporting their child with yours to and from an activity, or just offering a sympathetic ear, to name a few. For those who find themselves in this situation, God is with you; He will be your Head if you ask Him and seek Him.

I was mother and breadwinner, but God in His mercy did not leave me in that state. He gave me a second husband, a godly man who finished his course a few years ago. My husband's kindness and patience allowed me to practice the principles God was teaching me through His word and His Church and to live the type of life He designed for women. I thought I had it together, but I learned that some of the world's lies about women were still deeply rooted in my mind. Could you also be a victim?

A Place of Honor

Mainstream society promotes many ungodly ideas that target women. They seek to *deprive* us of the roles God designed specifically for women and *deny* us the happiness those roles can bring. Sadly, some of these ideas may be deeply rooted in the subconscious; I know they are in mine. We cannot look at women in society, compare ourselves to them, and then feel like we are okay. We have to strive to *live up to* God's standards. God wants women to respect and honor their husbands, love their children, be homemakers, and have a humble disposition (1 Peter 3:4).

God will change all hearts in His Kingdom, and women will value their roles and responsibilities. As Christian women, we must examine what we really think about these issues now and bring our ideas into agreement with God. Remember, we will teach women their proper roles—and in order to teach them, we must believe and live them. Forewarned is forearmed. Ladies beware. (LN)

Overcoming Many Tests

By **William Long**

Adventure Camp 2021 was held in the beautiful Bob Marshall Wilderness of Northwest Montana. Thirty-one campers and staff experienced beautiful mountain views—but the scenery was not all we enjoyed. There were encouraging Bible studies each day and we “did hard things,” making the entire experience truly memorable.

On Tuesday, August 3, campers and staff arrived at the Best Western Flathead hotel in Kalispell, Montana, which was our “base camp.” We ate dinner together before discussing the schedule of activities for the seven-day trip. We also discussed the inherent dangers of a backcountry backpacking trip—including bears and possible weather conditions—as well as the importance of staying hydrated and well fed.

The following day, we hiked to Mt. Aeneas in the Jewel Basin of Flathead National Forest. The hike started in lush, green forests, but at higher elevations the trees gave way to shrubs and boulders. There were even small patches of snow as we approached the 7,477-foot summit, which we reached by mid-afternoon. The difficult climb was well worth the incredible view. From the summit, huge mountain lakes below looked like tiny ponds. The mountains all around us inspired a sense of awe and the majesty of our great God, calling to mind Jesus’ statement in Matthew 21:21: “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done.”

The magnitude of the mountains also illustrated the encouraging lesson that with God’s power and guidance, we can overcome the “mountains” in our lives, such as trials of health, family struggles, and job stresses. We cannot overcome without God’s divine intervention on our behalf, but He is willing and happy to intervene for us as we seek to please and trust Him.

Through Thursday and Friday, we hiked in the Jewel Basin area again. On Thursday we reached Strawberry Lake after a three-mile hike with a 2,000-foot elevation gain. Though we couldn’t have a bonfire that evening because of August fire prevention regulations, the strenuous hike proved well worth the effort as we enjoyed fellowship and games on the sandy

lakeshore. Because of the elevation, it was a cool evening in the 40s (Fahrenheit) and we had to really bundle up in our sleeping bags at bedtime.

On Friday morning, we broke camp and hiked to another, larger lake called Wildcat Lake. It was a good stopping point for lunch before we completed the day at the Camp Misery Trailhead. Once the hike was complete, we piled into vans and headed back to base camp for the Sabbath and warm showers!

Sabbath Rest and Further Adventures

Sabbath morning was relaxing and filled with fellowship before afternoon services were held in a room with an entire wall of windows facing the mountains that surround the town of Kalispell. The setting was a perfect reminder of God and His creation. It made the Sabbath very special as we assembled as He commanded.

On Sunday, we hit the trail again to climb to yet another summit! We drove to the town of Whitefish and hiked the Danny On Memorial Hiking Trail up Big Mountain (7,000 ft.). At the summit, we enjoyed snacks and refreshments before taking the ski lift down the mountain. Clouds had partially obscured the spectacular view on the hike up, but on the way down the skies cleared enough for us to see the distant mountains of Glacier National Park and the Canadian Rockies.

On the final full day of camp, Monday, we drove to the town of Hungry Horse to shop and enjoy some huckleberry pie before visiting Hungry Horse dam, which is only 44 miles from the Canadian border. According to the National Park Service, “At 564 feet high, Hungry Horse is one of the largest concrete arch dams in the United States, and its morning-glory spillway, with water cascading over the rim and dropping 490 feet, is the highest in the world” (“Montana: Hungry Horse Dam,” *NPS.gov*).

On Tuesday, August 10, all campers and staff departed for home, sad for the adventure to end. We had all built long-lasting memories and bonds of fellowship while hiking and facing many and varied challenges.

Physical Tests and Spiritual Benefits

Adventure Camp not only tests participants physically; it also helps them to recognize our God-given potential to overcome

and build faith, as well as to see and appreciate His care for us in all circumstances. That understanding helps us learn to trust in His guidance. While the mental and emotional tests are more subtle than the obvious physical tests, they have a greater lasting impact on everyone who fully embraces the challenges of Adventure Camp.

Through our daily Bible studies, we were reminded that God created us to build strength and courage, both of which must be tried and tested to reach their full potential. While hiking in the backcountry is a tough physical test, it's also a test of our emotional and mental strength—and everyone passed! We also learned how God can do incredible things in and through us. That knowledge increases our faith, allowing God to use us even more. We recognized that we must give God the credit and not give in to the temptation to think of ourselves as “lucky” or “fortunate.”

Another important lesson we learned was that failure and sacrifice are part of the path to overcoming sin, Satan, and

worldly society. Satan wants to see every Christian destroyed. He uses failure and sacrifice to discourage us, but God reminds us that we can actually use trials to find strength and encouragement.

How we respond to difficulties is a good indication of our closeness with God. The book of Proverbs states that “a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity” (Proverbs 24:16), and King David wrote, “The LORD upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down” (Psalm 145:14).

We were very thankful for the opportunity to grow together in the beautiful setting of the northern Rockies. Adventure Camp is a special experience that reminds us of our Creator, who we are as His people, and our Christian potential as His creation. The life we live is a training ground, preparing us to rule with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We thank God for His guidance and protection, and for the lessons He taught us this year. ^(LN)



Births

Mr. and Mrs. Neil (Bria) Amado are thrilled to announce the birth of their son, **Abel Roderick Amado**. He was born on July 14, weighing seven pounds, twelve ounces and measuring 20.5 inches long. Baby and mother are doing very well. The Amado family attends the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard (Gretchen) Jacques are happy to announce the birth of a baby boy. **Henry Ryker Jacques** was born July 1, weighing six pounds, two ounces and measuring 19 inches long. His four brothers and one

sister are excited to have an addition to their team. The Jacques family attends the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation.

On June 26, **Peder Isaac Douglas Moluf** was born to Peder and Melisa Moluf of the Kansas City, Missouri, congregation. Isaac is their first son, following sisters Charlotte and Jocelyn. He weighed eight pounds, eight ounces and measured 20.5 inches long.

Mr. and Mrs. Ryan (Lisa) Patterson were blessed with the birth of their third daughter, **Sophie Irene Patterson**, on

August 6. Sophie was big and healthy, measuring 21 inches long and weighing ten pounds, seven ounces. Older sisters Ava and Rachel welcomed Sophie to the family with lots of kisses and cuddles! The Patterson family attends the Dallas, Texas, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Matt (Sharon) Stone are excited to announce the arrival of their first child. **Riley Michelle Stone** was born on March 11. She weighed seven pounds, nine ounces and was 21 inches long. Everyone in the Tulsa, Oklahoma, congregation is thrilled to have a baby at services again.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. Chris Sookdeo of the San Fernando, Trinidad, congregation married **Ms. Dominique Julien** of the Chaguanas, Trinidad, congregation on May 23. Even though the guests were limited to ten persons present, 91 households from throughout the Caribbean, South America, the United States, and Belgium joined via livestream. The couple was counseled by Area Pastor Paul Shumway, and the ceremony was performed by Associate Pastor Damian Weekes. The happy couple attends the San Fernando congregation.

Mr. Damian Calkins of the Traverse City, Michigan, congregation and **Miss Elizabeth Munson** of the Kalamazoo, Michigan, congregation were united in marriage in the presence of family and friends on August 29. The wedding took place in a beautiful outdoor setting in Marcellus, Michigan. Mr. Bill Long performed the ceremony. Mr. and Mrs. Calkins attend the Traverse City congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. George (Irma) Booth celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on August 2. Mr. Booth is a longtime member of God's Church, baptized in 1964. The institution of marriage is a blessing from God, and the Winnipeg, Manitoba, congregation in Canada is thrilled to have such an example in its midst. Congratulations to the Booths on their wonderful milestone.

Dr. and Mrs. Jeffrey (Barbara) Fall celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on July 2, and the Sacramento, California, congregation honored them with a cake and sparkling cider, surprising them after Sabbath services on June 26. Mrs. Fall commented that they began attending the Church of God approximately a year after their marriage, and that the years in the Church have been the "joy of our life.... When we were baptized, we left a very close family, but found our family once again in the Church of God."

On September 4, the Fayetteville, North Carolina, congregation honored **Mr. and**

Mrs. Arland (Susan) Hill with a beautiful bouquet of flowers in recognition of their 50th wedding anniversary. Mr. and Mrs. Hill were married on that date in 1971, and called into God's Church decades later through a *Tomorrow's World* Presentation. They were baptized together in 2019 and are active members of the Fayetteville congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Paul (Gloria) Shumway recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. They were married on July 11, 1971. One of the many highlights of their lives occurred at the Feast of Tabernacles that year in Penticton, British Columbia, when Mr. Herbert Armstrong ordained Mr. Shumway as an elder. Through the years, the Shumways have served God's people in 22 states, the Caribbean, Guyana, and Brazil. One of their great joys is their family of four lovely daughters and six beloved grandchildren, all striving to serve God as members of LCG.

On the eve of their anniversary, July 10, Elder Alvin Cumberbatch surprised

the couple by inviting them to the stage at the conclusion of Sabbath services. He shared some personal interactions he'd had with them, after which they were presented with a beautiful fruit basket and music CD. Mr. Israel Mallet then read tributes from their daughters, recalling lessons from their childhood. They expressed deep appreciation for their parents' fine example and instruction that helped guide them in holding fast to God's magnificent truth. One vivid memory was the consistency of the example set at home and at church—no deviation from what they taught. Another was that Dad never let a teaching moment go by without taking

advantage of it, while Mom's kind, understanding love and patience provided a wonderful balance. Mr. and Mrs. Shumway make a great team! Their love for family and the brethren has been a real inspiration over the years. His arm around his wife, Mr. Shumway thanked the congregation for their love and support. He commented on how quickly those 50 years had gone by, and Mrs. Shumway later commented that never in her wildest dreams could she have imagined spending their golden anniversary in the Caribbean on the beautiful island of Barbados. The brief ceremony was greatly appreciated by the brethren, who broke out in spontaneous bursts of applause.

ORDINATIONS

Mr. Angel Alvarado was ordained a deacon on July 31 by Area Pastor Wyatt Ciesielka and Elder Harvey Friddle. Mr. Alvarado serves in the Raleigh, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. Keith Bibb was ordained a deacon on July 3 by Regional Pastor Lambert Greer. Mr. Bibb serves in the Cincinnati, Ohio, congregation.

Messrs. Brian Bowman and **Bill Ridgely** were ordained deacons and **Mrs. Tammy Loy** was ordained a deaconess on the Feast of Trumpets by Area Pastor Scott Winnail as well as Elder

Maynard Marvel, Jr., and Mr. Kenneth Frank, visiting pastor from Charlotte Headquarters. Mr. Bowman serves in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, congregation and Mr. Ridgely and Mrs. Loy serve in the Winchester, Virginia, congregation.

Mr. Bruce Chwalek was ordained a deacon on the Day of Atonement by Area Pastor Yancy Taber. Mr. Chwalek serves in the Fort Wayne, Indiana, congregation.

Mr. Ben Maddox was ordained a deacon on June 26 by Area Pastor Rich-

ard Franz. Mr. Maddox serves in the Springfield, Illinois, congregation.

Mr. Joel Tello Morales was ordained a deacon on June 12 by Regional Director Mario Hernandez and Area Pastor Cristian Orrego. Mr. Tello serves in the Mazatenango, Guatemala, congregation.

Mr. Stephen Wooley was ordained an elder on the Feast of Trumpets by Regional Pastor Lambert Greer. Mr. Wooley serves in the Cincinnati, Ohio, congregation.

In Loving Memory

Mrs. Yolanda (Gomez) Aguirre, 85, of the Albuquerque, New Mexico, congregation, died on July 1. She and her husband Guillermo "Bill" Enriquez Aguirre were baptized into God's Church in 1980 and remained faithful members to the end. They were blessed with two daughters, including Yvette Aguirre, also a member of the Albuquerque congregation. Mrs. Aguirre loved all people and enjoyed joking with family, brethren, and friends. She had many talents, including organizing events and cooking wonderful meals. Giving was a way of life for her, and she always found a way to share what she had. Her faith, joy, laughter, and caring nature made others feel warm and comfortable. Her two children, two grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren were close to her heart and never far from her memory, nor was her husband who predeceased her by 15 years. Mrs. Aguirre was a unique personality, full of life and love, and she will be missed by all who knew her.

Mr. Ronald J. Bertrand, 74, died August 2 after a long and courageous battle with multiple serious health problems. Baptized in 1970, Mr. Bertrand was a faithful member of God's Church for more than 50 years and attended the Lafayette, Louisiana, congregation. Mr. Bertrand is survived by his wife Wanita who is also a longtime member, son Jacob, two brothers, and one sister.

Mr. Hassel Bostic, 88, died on July 9. He attended the Columbus, Ohio, congregation. Born in Pikeville, Kentucky, he grew up on a farm in a family of 17. He eventually retired from the United States Army, his service in which had included two tours of combat in the Korean War, as well as from driving a Columbus city bus for 30 years. He had also worked in food services for the Marriott company. Mr. Bostic learned about the Church in the 1970s, and many saw his example of dedica-

tion to God and God's way of being respectful and honorable in all things. God's instructions were his first priority, including in unexpected and challenging circumstances. After his death, Mr. Bostic's family found his Bible open to Matthew 19, with a paper bookmark on which he had written, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27) and "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14). He was preceded in death by his wife Barbara and six siblings. He is survived by one daughter, one son, four grandchildren, eight siblings, and many nieces, nephews, and friends. Area Pastor Phil Sena and Elder Mike Walsh officiated at his funeral.

Mrs. Mary Louise (Reeser) Gibson, 99, died August 14 at her home in a retirement community. Born in 1922, the ninth of ten children, she grew up in southern Ohio. In 1942 she married James Gibson, a marriage that lasted for more than 60 years. Mr. and Mrs. Gibson were longtime members of God's Church, though physical ailments kept her from attending with the Columbus, Ohio, congregation during the last years of her life. She enjoyed doing crafts and jigsaw puzzles, and regularly checked on other residents at the care home, especially those who were lonely or less active. Her family remembers her homemaking and cooking skills and her kindness to everyone. Her Church family remembers her gratitude for cards and visits. She was truly grateful for all that was good in her life, and prayed for the Work, the brethren around the world, and the others who lived in the retirement community. Besides her husband, she was predeceased by one son and one daughter. Left to honor her memory are two daughters, one son-in-law, four grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

Mrs. Rachel Elizabeth Hendrickson, 36, died on May 15. Born in Tennessee, she was baptized in 2010 and moved to Texas in 2013. On October 6, 2019 she married Mr. Michael Hendrickson, and together they attended the Temple, Texas, congregation. Mrs. Hendrickson enjoyed playing the flute and was known for being caring and selfless. She is survived by her husband, her parents, one sister, and one brother.

Mrs. Nadine Knowlton, 93, died on June 28. She was a member of the Columbus, Ohio, congregation until she became homebound and moved to Georgia to be near family. She was preceded in death in 2013 by her husband of 61 years, Charles Knowlton, a longtime minister in God's Church. Mrs. Knowlton came from a close-knit and loving family and was raised on a farm where hard work was deeply valued. She married Mr. Knowlton in 1952 and was his supportive and loving companion. When Mr. Knowlton was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 1963, Mrs. Knowlton vowed to God that if her husband's life were spared, she would support and follow him anywhere his faith would lead—a vow she admirably and wholly

kept. They were both baptized in 1970 and moved many times all over the country through their long marriage, especially after he became a minister in God's Church in 1981. As a minister's wife, she was a difference-maker to many people, humbly setting an example of what true love and commitment look like. Mrs. Knowlton was beloved by all who knew her, and everyone knew her to be a very selfless, compassionate, and thoughtful person with a terrific sense of humor. She will be deeply missed. Besides her husband, she was predeceased by two sons. She is survived by one son, Brent, a member in the Akron, Ohio, congregation, as well as by three daughters, eight grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

Mr. Dennis Wayne Morrison, 70, died at his residence in Thorndale, Texas, on June 22. He was a native Texan and was a retired Maintainer Operator in the Public Works Department of Williamson County. Baptized into God's Church in 2016 he was a member of the Temple, Texas, congregation. He was a warm, friendly, and gentle man and will be very much missed. He is survived by three daughters, twelve grandchildren, several great-grandchildren, and three brothers.

Mrs. Lucretia "Chris" Smith, 77, died on August 2 in hospice care after a short illness. She was baptized with her husband Tony M. Smith in 1968, and through the years they attended congregations in Alabama, North Carolina, Texas, and Florida. Mr. Smith was a longtime elder in God's Church. In 2008, Mrs. Smith moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, to be closer to family, and she worked at the Church Headquarters for ten years, serving in several capacities. Mrs. Smith loved sports, especially playing basketball. She lettered all four years of high school on the basketball team and became known as "Lefty Lu" because of her left-hand hook shot. She continued to play basketball in Church tournaments as an adult. Mrs. Smith was a dedicated wife and mother and had a wonderful serving and giving attitude. She loved to travel and meet brethren from all around the world. Her love of the truth and dedication to the Work were evident to the end. Mrs. Smith and her husband fought the good fight, kept the faith, and finished the race. He predeceased her in 1999. She is survived by their son Mark D. Smith, as well as one brother and many other beloved family members and friends. She will be greatly missed and lovingly remembered. May God's Kingdom come soon.

Mr. David Spurgeon, 81, died on July 12 at his home, after being under hospice care for several months for heart-related problems. His wife Janice was his caregiver during this time and was with him when he died. Mr. and Mrs. Spurgeon began receiving literature from the Radio Church of God in 1966. They attended their first Sabbath service in 1967 with

the El Monte, California, congregation and were baptized in November of that year in the indoor pool at Ambassador College. They were ordained deacon and deaconess in July 2000, serving in the Banning, California, congregation. Mr. Spurgeon is survived by his wife of 63 years, son Penn and daughter-in-law Judi (LCG members in Colorado), twin daughters, eight grandchildren, eleven great-grandchildren, and three great-great-grandchildren. Mr. Spurgeon was faithful to the end and is tremendously missed.

Mrs. Kathy Etola Strine, 75, of the Terre Haute, Indiana, congregation, died following a brief illness on the Feast of Trumpets. She was married for more than 55 years to her husband, Bill, and they were blessed with two sons and one daughter. Mrs. Strine lived a long, productive life of service to her family on their family farm. She was an avid gardener who loved growing flowers and fruit trees. Her baptism in 1970

marked the beginning of her walk with God and service to His Church, which lasted more than half a century. She truly possessed the heart of a Christian warrior and set an example of enduring to the end even while facing difficult circumstances. Mrs. Strine is survived by her husband and their three children, as well as by two brothers and one sister. Her memorial service was conducted by Area Pastor Yancy Taber.

Mr. John Valance, 80, died on July 19. He was a member of the Prescott Valley, Arizona, congregation. Mr. Valance was a professional welder and truck driver. He was a very loving, caring person, whose words were kind and appreciative of others. As a young boy, he first heard Mr. Armstrong on the radio when his mother listened to the *World Tomorrow* program, and he would go on to be a longtime member of God's Church. He is survived by his wife Janice, also a member in the Prescott Valley congregation, and other family members.

News from West Africa

Our time in West Africa has been very profitable. In Accra, we have started a new congregation. Our membership has been slowly growing, and we had 15 people in attendance for Sabbath services, all eager to continue meeting. They will connect with Zoom services from the UK. Mr. Truth Amedzekor is back in his home country, so it was good to have him with us meeting various people from the past. One man I baptised in 1978 spent some five hours with us. He lives relatively near Mr. Amedzekor's home. I also met the elder for another group here in Ghana, a man I've known since the 1970s. He was eager to make contact and see us each time we visit Ghana.

We visited again with the Church of the Living God, whose name in the French language is identical to ours. It was formed in 1969 based on the literature the leader received from WCG. They are eager to maintain contact and use our literature.

On Monday, August 2, we flew to Abidjan in the Ivory Coast to visit a number of individuals. Ivorians speak French, so this was purely Mr. Rees Ellis' area for counselling. We met a man from western Cote d'Ivoire who takes care of some 100 people in nine congregations. They have stated that they would like to be part of LCG. Mr. Ellis had invited a number of people to meet that afternoon; only three turned up of those invited, but they brought others with them, so Mr. Ellis spent a busy late afternoon with eight young adults who are keen to know more of the truth.

That evening, we flew on to Togo. Our time there was spent visiting "Go-To's" in *Eglise du Dieu Vivant*, the Togolese branch of the Church of the Living God whom we visited in Ghana, and visiting our own congregation in the eastern area of Togo. A minibus load of the brethren from Benin took the opportunity to cross the border into Togo to visit with us, so we had a group of 50 brethren with a few children on Wednesday.

We also had an interesting visit with a man who was baptised in WCG in 1988 and refused to accept the new teachings proclaimed during the apostasy. He has quietly kept the Sabbath and Holy Days ever since and attracted a group of about 18 individuals to join him. He established contact with Mr. Ellis over a year ago, and this is the first occasion Mr. Ellis has had to visit with him. He and those with him eagerly wish to be part of LCG. We had a get-together with the group at the small venue they use for services, a former restaurant under his house in Lomé. He has faithfully kept to the faith once delivered. They are keen to get together with the other Togolese brethren to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Obviously, a lot of areas need discussion—the baptising of these people, hands being laid on them, etc. But they are ecstatic about the opportunity to be taught and be part of the Work. WCG in Lomé apparently was at best a congregation of some 50 people, so this is an encouraging start for us.

—Peter G. Nathan

Harvest Time Is Coming

The term *harvest* refers to the season when crops have ripened, to an item of produce, or to the act of gathering crops. Everybody loves a freshly harvested apple, peach, orange, grape, strawberry, or other piece of produce. Those involved in agricultural production are especially familiar with harvest seasons.

Autumn weather now marches through most of the Northern Hemisphere, where the agricultural harvest time is largely behind us, and people of many nations prepare eagerly for various civic holidays, like the American and Canadian Thanksgiving days centered on enjoying the bounty of produce. But even as physical plantings and harvests come to an end each year, there are profound spiritual lessons to learn from them.

Scripture often uses the term “harvest” to describe God’s judgments and “harvests” of mankind—the very purpose for which we were created. After the flood in Noah’s day, God promised, “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22).

God set His annual Holy Days in three different harvest seasons: the barley harvest in the early spring, the wheat harvest in early summer, and the “great harvest” of summer fruits (figs, olives, pomegranates, etc.) in the fall (Exodus 23). Later, God used His prophets to warn nations of judgment coming like a harvest as the fruits of their ways became ripe (Joel 3:1–13).

Jesus often used parables to teach, one of which was the parable of the sower. Some of the seed fell by the wayside, some on stony ground, some among thorns, and some on good

ground. He explained to His disciples that the seed represented the good news of the Kingdom of God, which bears fruit only in good soil. Those who bear fruit are those who hear the Gospel, accept it, and change their lives accordingly (Mark 4:2–20).

Later in Mark 4, Christ taught the parable of the growing seed, which was used as an analogy of the Kingdom of God. The seed was sown, sprouted as a tender blade, grew, produced a head of grain, and finally ripened. Only when this was complete had the time to harvest come (vv. 26–29).

When asked by His disciples if He had anything to eat, Jesus interestingly told them that He had food to eat that they did not know. His food is to do God’s will and finish His work (John 4:32–34). Then He explained that Work as a harvest. Perhaps quoting a common saying, He said, “There are still four months and then comes the harvest,” but then revealed that the harvest was ripe already (v. 35–38). He was talking about gathering “fruit for eternal life.” The disciples were called to help reap the harvest, which is still in progress. This is the small, early harvest. But even though it is small, Jesus told His disciples to “pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest,” because “the harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few” (Luke 10:2; Matthew 9:37–38). The larger, later harvest will take place after Christ returns to the earth to set up the Kingdom of God.

God’s whole purpose for the creation of humanity is to offer mankind salvation and the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23). In Matthew 13, Jesus’ parable of the wheat and tares shows that the wheat is harvested, but the tares burned up (vv. 24–30). The harvest periods reveal God’s plan—and harvest time is coming.

Will you be ready?

—Roger Meyer