

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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September-October 2021

Let Us Come Together

Dear Brethren,

It has been a long road since March 2020, with various degrees of restrictions and shutdowns around the world due to the pandemic. Thankfully, most of us were able to meet in person for the Feast of Tabernacles last year—but, sadly, some were disappointed when government edicts restricted meetings and travel and venues locked their doors.

Last year, the State of Vermont shut its borders to outsiders, but we were successful in replacing the planned site at Mt. Snow with one in another state. The Canadian province of Quebec closed its borders—even limiting travel within the province—24 hours before Opening Night, and meeting restrictions shut down the planned venue, making it impossible for members to keep the Feast as planned. This happened in other parts of the world and was a great disappointment to those caught in such circumstances. We had to line up four sites in Kenya late in the game due to government restrictions. Happily, with the exception of those in Quebec and Mexico, most members were able to attend the Feast in North America without the need for livestreaming. It should be noted that some countries restrict travel at the point of a gun!

Most of us look forward to “going up to the Feast” as instructed in Scripture, but are there any exceptions? Were we the first to face a situation such as that of 2020, when it was not possible for all of our members worldwide to attend in person? Do the Scriptures reveal the mind of God on what to do during abnormal times? Are there any reasons why a true servant of God may keep the Feast at home and not be in violation of the law of God? And should we make the exception the rule?

We read, “Three times a year *all your males* shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at

the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed” (Deuteronomy 16:16).

Why is this command only stated with regard to *males*? Does this imply that these Feasts were not also for wives and daughters? Not at all. We see that they are also included in verses just preceding the above statement: “And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son *and your daughter*; your male servant *and your female servant* and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless *and the widow*, who are within your gates” (v. 14).

Women are also included in the command found in Deuteronomy 14:26, which says that “you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, *you and your household*.” Then there is the example of Jesus’ family, all of whom went up to the Feast each year, including Mary, His mother (Luke 2:41, 48). So, if God expects the whole family to attend the Feast, why does the statement in Deuteronomy 16:16 only appear to require “males” to attend?

There Are Exceptions

When I first began attending services, instructions were given each year for women in their last month of pregnancy to stay home and not go to the Feast. Having a baby at the Feast carried with it risks and problems on top of the stress of traveling for what could be two to four days each way when we had just one or two sites in all of North America. Deuteronomy makes an exception to accommodate a happy condition that younger wives often found themselves in; remember, until recent times, it was not at all unusual for a woman to become pregnant and even give birth five to 15 times. When necessary travel would be on foot or on the back of an animal, not

Volume 23, No. 5



Inside This Issue...

The “How Long” Question... p. 3
Socialism, Capitalism, and the Kingdom of God... p. 6
Seven Keys for End-Time Endurance... p. 10
What the Parable of the Sower Shows Us About the Last Great Day... p. 14

Festival 2021... p. 17
Men’s Training Camps... p. 20
Local Church News... p. 22
Tomorrow’s World TV Commercial... p. 23
Commentary... p. 24

requiring women to attend under such strain would be very understandable.

The Bible also instructed mother and child to be separate from the temple for a set period of days—though we have never taken this instruction or similar ritualistic rules as requirements for Christians today (Luke 2:22; Leviticus 12). However, following the principles found in God's word, the Church did instruct mothers to stay home from Sabbath services for a month to rest and give the infant time to adjust to a new world outside the womb.

There are other situations in which the Bible strongly indicates that servants of God failed to go up to Jerusalem—the only site at the time—during the Feast. Elijah hid out from King Ahab for three-and-a-half years. Ahab's wife Jezebel “massacred the prophets of the LORD” and so Ahab's servant Obadiah “had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water” (1 Kings 18:4). Even today, we recognize exceptions for both men and women to stay behind due to health issues, if the place where God has set His name is too far from them (Deuteronomy 12:21), or when a family member has a health issue and should not travel to the Feast, or is at the point of death. The Bible—the mind of God in print—makes it clear that, although they should not be abused, there *are* legitimate reasons why someone might not travel to keep the Feast.

The Exceptions Are Not the Rule

The year 1961 was the first year the Church opened a Festival site in Squaw Valley, California—the second in North America in addition to the one in Big Sandy, Texas. I was absolutely brand new in God's Church at the time and it seemed that there had been some controversy over the subject of how God places His name for the Feast, and I remember hearing a full sermon on the subject while on my way to the Feast. God has never left it up to the individual to determine where He “has placed His name.” God works through the government of the Church to make these decisions.

Now *this is important*, dear brethren: Last year was obviously a difficult and disappointing year when large meetings were not always possible. In Mexico, Mr. Mario Hernandez and Mr. Cristian Orrego arranged 13 small in-home groups

and tied them together with services electronically. I had the privilege of giving one of the sermons to all our Spanish-speaking brethren throughout Central and South America, as well as some who were there in person in New Bern, North Carolina. This is how and where God chose to place His name for His Spanish-speaking people last year. This was arranged by the Church under exceptional circumstances, not only to comply with government mandates, but also to guard the health of our members. Sadly, some self-willed individuals may have a problem with this, as they do with other decisions the ministry makes dealing with controversial issues.

We are talking here of obvious exceptions, but we must not make the exception the rule. There does appear to be a trend among a few to think that where they keep the Feast is solely a matter of personal preference. If a Festival site is more than two or three hours away, some may simply think, *Let's keep it at home this year*. Every year, we have members of other Church of God groups who want to attend with us because we are closer to where they live, and we know a few of our members think similarly—but is it the mind of God to just do what is convenient?

I've talked in this letter about exceptions, but we must not fall into the satanic trap of thinking it is okay to decide on our own where God has placed His name, especially staying at home for mere “convenience” when there is no compelling reason to do so. And the same goes for attending Sabbath services.

We provide DVDs and streamed services for those whose situations may prevent attendance in person, but we have *never* taught, other than during an exceptional time such as last year, that *many* of us might have an emergency need to “keep the Feast” in our homes. And *always*, we are to save up our Festival tithe “year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide... that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always” (Deuteronomy 14:22–23).

Let us all do our best to come together and rejoice before our Creator in the locations where He has chosen to place His name!



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EDITORIAL By Gerald E. Weston

The “How Long” Question

Every year as we review the third and final Festival season, the question comes to many; *How long?* How long will it be until Trumpets, Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles become reality? The fulfillment of these Festivals will begin within a short span of time. The Last Great Day will have to wait a thousand years, but for born spirit beings, the Millennium, pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles, will seem as only a 24-hour day—well, maybe a little longer to newly born children of God, but it will pass much more quickly than we might imagine.

People often ask me the “how long” question, and I studiously avoid making specific, dogmatic statements. Recently, one gentleman gave me his speculation and I assured him that there was nothing necessarily wrong with *him* speculating—but the same was not true for *me*. The reason is simple; while the Church of God historically has understood the general outline of prophecy, every time we have tried to be specific about prophetic timing, we have been wrong.

At one time, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong thought that the events of World War II were leading to the very end. That was certainly reasonable considering the horrific conflict that engulfed the entire world, ultimately taking the lives of tens of millions. The National WWII Museum in New Orleans estimates that there were 15 million combatant deaths, 45 million civilian deaths, and an additional 25 million wounded in combat. It also states in a footnote, “Worldwide casualty estimates vary widely in several sources. The number of civilian deaths in China alone might well be more than 50,000,000” (“Research Starters: Worldwide Deaths in World War II,” *NationalWW2Museum.org*).

The scope of that war is so staggering that those of us who did not live through it may find it difficult to comprehend. If we had experienced that time, perhaps we could better understand why Mr. Armstrong mistakenly interpreted German General Erwin Rommel moving toward Egypt and what was then called Palestine in the light of Daniel 11 and assigned apocalyptic significance to the destruction occurring all around the world.

He later wrote a booklet titled *1975 in Prophecy*. It was never intended to set that year as the date of Christ’s return, but instead was highlighting a signifi-

cant milestone in the future as many others have done; for example, George Orwell’s *1984*, published in 1949, and William and Paul Paddock’s *Famine 1975! America’s Decision: Who Will Survive?*, written in 1967. Today we might highlight a future year such as 2050, not intending to imply that 2050 is a specific year during which we expect something earth-shattering to happen. But in the course of time, *1975 in Prophecy* took on a life of its own. Some Ambassador College faculty began calculating, using 19-year time cycles, that the work of the Church could end in 1972 with the three-and-a-half-year period mentioned in Revelation taking us to 1975.

I do not know when Mr. Armstrong began to consider that 1975 could be the year, but I do know firsthand that, as late as 1969, on the occasion of one of the Senior Dinners that he hosted in his home, he thought it *possible* for things to wrap up by then. At the same time, however, he strongly warned the Church not to set dates. And Dr. Meredith was already saying as early as 1968 that “the end of the Work in 1972” and “the return of Christ in 1975” were dates that would come and go without those expected events.

When it was clear that 1972 was not the end of the Work, people looked for other dates and some concluded that the error was in subtracting the seven years of Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity from the 2,520 years from the fall of Babylon in 539 BC. This recalculation brought us to the year 1979 for the end of the Work, with Christ returning in 1982. That was nearly 40 years ago—obviously, speculators were wrong again.

Perhaps we can be forgiven such errors, as we are in the company of the Apostle Paul, who wrote, “Then **we who are alive and remain** shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This certainly applies to some people, perhaps many of us, but Paul wrote to a contemporary audience, while God inspired it for all times. Paul did not set any specific dates as far as we know, yet it may seem in his epistles that he thought they were living very near to the end of the age—certainly not 2,000 years away from it!

It is natural to want to know how long we have left to wait, and it is natural to hope that Christ’s return will be within our own personal lifetime. This natural tendency to speculate must be tempered by mature

thinking whereby we learn from the past. It would seem that, given the history of the last 100 years, we should have learned not to attempt specific predictions. Dr. Meredith realized this, refusing to be specific, but when pressed for some indication he would say that he thought it would be seven to 17 years—and he repeated that for a decade or more, as a moving target.

This is not a criticism of Paul, Mr. Armstrong, or Dr. Meredith, but it should be a lesson for all of us. Sadly, some never learn, and they go beyond simple speculation and count on specific dates. When one date fails to bring Christ's return, they set another—then another, then another. And sometimes they become discouraged and leave the faith. While it is fun to speculate, the problem is that some people begin making important decisions based on their speculations: not furthering

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their education, not getting their teeth fixed, rushing into a poorly matched marriage, etc.

The best approach is to look to what Jesus told His disciples when they were asking, *When?* “And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’” (Acts 1:7–8).

There was also the parable of the minas. “Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately” (Luke 19:11). He went on to explain that His servants should do the Work until He returned. In other words, we are to focus on the task at hand, not on trying to determine when the looked-for reward will come.

A now-deceased evangelist and well-known Ambassador College faculty member put it well: *Christ will come later than some expect, but sooner than others expect. Events may develop slowly and take longer than expected, but once they start, they can happen very quickly.* This is similar to the warning given by Robert Kagan based on the time immediately leading to WWI: “They learned, and we have now forgotten, that when things start to go wrong, they can go very wrong very quickly, that once a world order breaks down, the worst qualities of humanity emerge from under the rocks and run wild” (*The Jungle Grows Back*). Kagan also reminded us of a character in

Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. When asked how he went bankrupt, he responded, “Gradually and then suddenly.”

In reality, both categories—later than expected and sooner than expected—could apply to any of us and probably will to some, as indicated in Scripture. “Beloved, I now write to you... that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before... knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation’” (2 Peter 3:1–4). This indicates that at the end of the age—“the last days”—some will become cynical and disbelieve in the imminent return of Christ, or even that He will come at all!

Breaking into another prophetic thought, we read, “But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There

shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:48–51).

We might do well to explore why cynicism and an attitude of *the Lord has delayed His coming* develops. Could it be the perception that prophecies have failed? So it would seem.

When Prophecy “Fails”

The books of Ezra, Haggai, and Malachi are instructive. Ezra gives us the history of Judah's return from captivity, when 42,360, along with a few thousand others, returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple of God (Ezra 2:64–65). Scholars estimate that this was a small portion of those who were in Chaldean captivity, since they reckon that as many as two million Jews lived in Babylon at the time.

It must have been a daunting task, as we read of Jerusalem lying in rubble for decades, but they set up an altar and started offering sacrifices on the Feast of Trumpets (Ezra 3:1–3, 6). They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles that year (v. 4). Probably due to getting settled in from their journey and the need to construct shelters before the cold, rainy winter, they were delayed in the temple construction until after Passover the next year, when they began construction and celebrated the laying of the foundation (3:8, 10).

After an enthusiastic start, trouble set in from the inhabitants of the land. These inhabitants, later referred to as Samaritans, first offered to help in the work, but Zerubbabel was not naïve. He saw where this would lead—that the locals would assimilate the Jews and effectively take over the temple once

it was completed—and he would have none of it. This is not too dissimilar to well-intentioned-but-naïve members today who want to bring all the Churches of God together through social activity—not realizing that there are significant differences in focus, governance, and motivation between the groups. While this is not to compare other fellowships to the Samaritans, there is a reason why we are not all together! The Jews would build the temple by themselves, just as we will not become distracted by “grassroots” attempts to “bring everyone together.”

The locals then hired counselors—think *lawyers*—against them and wrote lying accusations to bring construction to a halt. This was done in the days of Cyrus and Ahasuerus (4:4–6). The result was that the Jews left off building the temple until the second year of Darius, king of Persia. Thus, temple construction was halted for a period of about 15 years.

What happened to start it once again? “Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them” (5:1–2).

What Did the Prophets Say?

This occurred around 520 BC, and a quick reading of Haggai reveals that his prophecies, while applying to that time, were really for a time that was then far into the future. But notice what he told the people on the first day of the sixth month during the second year of the reign of Darius (Haggai 1:1). They were called to build the temple of God but had become sidetracked by opposition and by their own human desires to take care of “number one.” God chided the people through His prophet for not doing the job that they were sent to do. “‘Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: “This people says, ‘The time has not come, the time that the LORD’s house should be built.’”’ Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, ‘Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?’” (Haggai 1:2–4).

They were cut off from blessings as a result of their lack of commitment. This was the “stick.” The “carrot” is found in the second chapter. On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (2:1), we read “For thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Haggai 2:6–9).

Zechariah also took them to task for failing to do their part (Zechariah 3–4). And he, too, wrote of a time in the fu-

ture when the Messiah would return. We often read of this, from Zechariah 14, during the Feast.

The Jews responded to the admonitions of these two prophets and their leaders. It was a major project that took four years to finish. Based on the predictions of the two prophets, they thought the Messiah would come soon—but He didn’t. The city of Jerusalem still lay in ruins, even to the time of Nehemiah, some 60 years later.

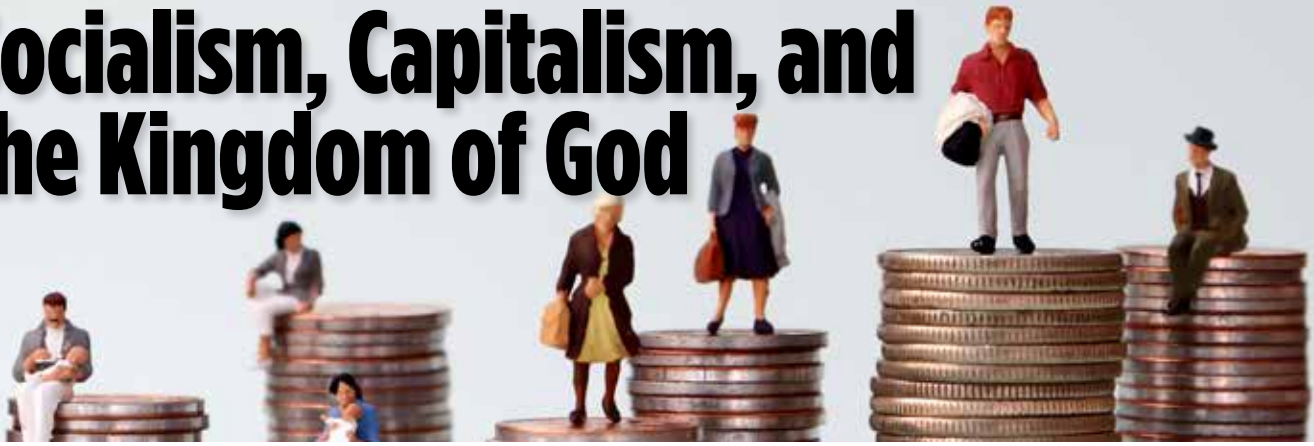
While we cannot know with absolute certainty, it appears that this is where the prophet Malachi came in. He spoke to a cynical, doubting, disillusioned people who wondered what good it did to serve God. They were not giving of their best to God, they were trifling with the law of God and divorcing their wives, they were stealing God’s tithes, and in all of this they were self-justifying and argumentative, denying that they were doing anything wrong.

For the Jews of that time, the long-anticipated Messiah that Haggai and Zechariah spoke of had failed to materialize. They had built the temple, but where was He? Yet He did come to that temple—but 500 years later than they expected! Some in our day have also lost the big picture. They have forgotten that they were called to do a Work. Rather than attempting to determine the time of His return, and thereby becoming disappointed if *our* timing does not work out, we need to do the Work He called us to do. The Messiah, whom we pray for daily to come and set up His Kingdom, will come at exactly the right time. When we look at our world around us, it is clear that this time is coming. For certain, it is closer now than when we first believed (Romans 13:11).

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:45–51).

We must not allow ourselves to be caught up in a *the-Lord-has-delayed-His-coming* attitude, but should look forward to hearing, in God’s perfect time, the most beautiful words we will ever hear: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matthew 25:21, 23). (LN)

Socialism, Capitalism, and the Kingdom of God



By **Wallace G. Smith**

For those in God's Church, it can be all too easy to take a side in the ideological conflicts of those who want to rule today's world. We watch the news, listen to the debates, read the thoughts of commentators and pundits, and combine these with the philosophies we grew up with, the ideas we learned in school, and our natural sense of patriotism—and the temptation to involve ourselves can become very intense.

But, as the Fall Holy Days remind us, the systems of this world, the philosophies of men, and the ideologies of the world's movements are all passing away. They will be replaced by the Kingdom of God, where Jesus Christ and His glorified saints will rule this world by implementing God's laws, principles, and ways. The fallacies of the world's passionately held beliefs and dogmas will be exposed, and ideals that seemed so wise in man's eyes will be seen for what they are: distractions and counterfeits.

As this Holy Day season turns our minds to Christ's return, the removal of Satan, and the establishment of Christ's millennial rule, let's dive into one of today's most contentious arguments—the debate between *socialism* and *capitalism*. Let's take time to see these approaches for what they are, examine them in the light of history and God's word, and remind ourselves that the Eternal calls us not to defend any human philosophy, but to advance His ideas, laws, and approach—the approach He will implement under the Messiah's rulership.

A Look at Socialism

"Socialism" used to be associated in the United States with failed regimes and dictatorships. Yet, in the U.S. presidential elections of 2016 and 2020, Senator Bernie Sanders was for a time considered a front-runner, despite calling himself a "democratic socialist." Clearly, times have changed.

But facts don't change, so let's take an unbiased look: What is socialism? While even socialists themselves disagree on many details, **socialism is essentially an economic and political approach to structuring society that advocates public ownership of a country's means of production and public administration of the distribution of goods.** In this

approach, the vehicle for determining public ownership and administration is usually the state or government.

A phrase popularized by communist philosopher Karl Marx encapsulates the principle driving many socialists, although it did not originate with him: *From each according to his ability, and to each according to his need.* Such sentiment reminds many of the attitude of God's Church in its earliest days: "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need" (Acts 2:44–45).

In Marx's view, capitalist ownership of the means of production is inherently oppressive, and human "progress" moves toward a state of communism—in which no one owns anything at all and there are no classes of man, no need for money, and no need even for structures of government. Marxism views today's socialist nations as very early experimenters on the road toward pure communism—and, indeed, the historical slide from socialism to Marx and communism only adds to the unease of those concerned about a nation's adopting *any* socialist policies, economic or otherwise.

Some believe the New Testament Church was socialist or communist—but that is a gross misunderstanding of verses taken out of context. Various passages make plain that early believers *did* retain private property and that their sharing was totally voluntary, motivated by temporary circumstances (e.g., the fact that most new converts had only intended to be in Jerusalem for the Pentecost season, without the means to stay for a longer period than planned). Yet it is easy to see that the apparent outward concern and focus of socialism might be appealing to those who feel that it is a less selfish, more compassionate approach to economics.

Evidence from History

But while theory may sound good when described by an economics professor, what results does it produce in *real* life? When we look at the history of nations that have adopted large-scale socialism as their economic model, are the lives of their people better for it? In fact, one of the most powerful objections to socialism is the history of nations associated with it. Nations such as Venezuela, Cuba, Cambodia, and the former Soviet Union each sought to fully embrace socialism, and

the tragedies that unfolded among their peoples—sometimes slowly, other times swiftly and horrifically—stand as warning signs for all who would move their nations in those directions.

As they first begin, socialist movements are often lauded by public intellectuals and academics as introducing a “better” system. Then, as tales of starvation, deprivation, and dictatorial abuses begin to mount, these are ignored or dismissed as exaggerations by those same intellectuals. (See Dr. Douglas Win-nail’s July 2021 *Tomorrow’s World* article, “What’s Behind the War on History?,” for more insight.) Eventually, the evidence of suffering, horror, and economic collapse grows too vast to ignore, and the narrative switches to how such states failed to *really* implement socialism or how the socialist policies *would* have worked if the government officials had not been corrupt.

That is one unavoidable characteristic of socialism as an economic system: Since it places such vast powers in the hands of “the people” collectively, which usually—of necessity—means the hands of state and government officials, it is dangerously vulnerable to governmental corruption. King David warned in Psalm 146:3, “Do not put your trust in princes,” and socialism concentrates vast power in the hands of a nation’s “princes.”

Aside from leadership, what of the individuals themselves, producing the goods of the society? There, human nature rears its selfish head, as well. Socialism takes the results of a society’s labor and distributes not according to individuals’ work, skill, and talent, but according to perceived needs. Thus, many individuals must work harder than they normally would to satisfy their own needs, since they must also provide for the needs of individuals they may never even meet.

This is quite contrary to human nature, and the results are predictable. For instance, in Plymouth—one of the Americas’ first European colonies—a form of communal work and ownership was practiced at first. William Bradford, the colony’s first governor, wrote that the initial attempt to build the colony by removing private property and establish common, communal ownership “was found to breed much confusion and discontent and retard much employment that would have been to their benefit and comfort. For the young men, that were most able and fit for labour and service, did repine that they should spend their time and strength to work for other men’s wives and children without any recompense.” Bradford later notes that the young men were not alone—none were motivated to work for others as passionately as they would for themselves and their own families. It was not until the communal arrangement was abandoned in favor of private ownership that the colony began to succeed.

A Look at Capitalism

So, let us briefly examine the system many see as the very opposite of socialism. **Capitalism is an approach to economics**

in which the means of production and capital goods produced are *privately* owned, and the distribution of those goods is determined by competition in a free market. In unrestricted capitalism, individuals are free to pursue their *own* interests and to own private property, without regard to supposed social needs. People are free to decide how best to use the resources they own to create products or services for which others may be willing to trade goods or give money. The profits of their efforts can be passed to their heirs, with no imposed obligation toward neighbor.

Eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher Adam Smith—whom many consider the “father of capitalism”—observed, “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.” That is, *The butcher provides you meat not out of his concern for your well-being, but out of his self-interest, seeking to benefit himself and his family by providing you that service.* Smith noted, “By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.” That is, *Allow every individual to freely work for his own self-interest, and the indirect result will be even better for society as a whole than if the same individuals had been purposefully trying to benefit society directly.*

Competition is key in capitalism. Those who provide goods compete to outperform others who provide similar goods—by making prices lower, products better, or both. As they do, they attract more customers who benefit from lower prices or better products, and competitors either learn to do better themselves or move on to a more profitable market for them, such as by developing new products or services to satisfy a currently unmet need.

We should note that God’s blessings on Israel—specifically, those on Manasseh (Genesis 48)—make it difficult to assess just now much of America’s success is connected to its politics and economics, and how much is God’s favor *despite* those factors. The U.S. is great not because of the wisdom of its “Founding Fathers” or policymakers, but due to the blessings bestowed on Abraham’s descendants! Yet no one can deny that capitalism has greatly increased the standard of living of many around the world.

Mixed Results

However, the fruit of capitalism is not all good. Here, let me offer full disclosure: As an American, I appreciate all that is available to me in my country, and I strive not to take it for granted. I sit here in a coffee shop on a Sunday afternoon working on this article on my laptop, keeping an eye on my cellphone for an expected text from my wife, and listening to some nice “work music” on my earphones; capitalism has provided many conveniences and pleasures for which I am grateful.

But just as socialism promises one outcome yet often delivers another, so too does capitalism. What theoretically should be a self-regulating economic system—in which goods and services are competitively priced for the betterment of everyone involved—often becomes a monopolistic system, or even turns into what is sometimes called “crony capitalism” in which powerful social or political forces strive to retain economic power for themselves instead of allowing a truly free market.

And life is not easy for some in a capitalist-leaning environment. Capitalism depends on competition and the unleashing of self-interest. Of course, friendly and fair competition, when commenced for fun or pleasure, is enjoyable. And self-interest is not completely the same as selfishness—after all, God promised “a land flowing with milk and honey” to ancient Israel as motivation, and Paul notes that “no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it” (Ephesians 5:29).

But while self-interest and selfishness are not identical, it is an easy slide from one to the other. And making competition a fundamental element by which livelihoods are sustained and wealth is accrued turns human civilization into something like that of the animals, where nature “red in tooth and claw” rules the day. For instance, how many of the most popular products of capitalism are crafted in “sweat shops”

But just as socialism promises one outcome yet often delivers another, so too does capitalism. What theoretically should be a self-regulating economic system **often becomes a monopolistic system or what is sometimes called “crony capitalism.”**

under horrific conditions? Do we *want* to know? Certainly, a producer can seek a more ethical—and more expensive—approach to producing his goods, but that doesn’t mean his competitor will. And when the economy is fundamentally driven by competition, winning becomes everything.

Beyond economic concerns, where does capitalism take a culture? When we are living in a world ruled by “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16), it should not be a surprise to see cultures that embrace capitalism growing corrupted and debased. And in capitalism’s reliance on self-interest, students of the Bible should see reflected the days of the judges of Israel, when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Is that brutal, every-man-for-himself world the world we desire?

And those who fear allowing politicians too much control over their lives should consider the potential impact of allow-

ing corporate CEOs to have such control. We are beginning to see this kind of influence, as in the “deplatforming” of individuals and organizations from social media sites. “That’s because of the influence of politicians!” cries the pure-capitalist. Yet what does the pure-socialist decry concerning faulty politics? “That’s because of the influence of corporate money!” Do you see a theme emerging?

Boundaries and Limits

We certainly see many elements of God’s way reflected in the principles of capitalism. “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15) is rooted in the reality of personal, private property, and the commandment against coveting includes not coveting “anything that is your neighbor’s” (v. 17). Private property passed from parents to children in God’s economy (e.g., Deuteronomy 21:15–17; Proverbs 13:22; Proverbs 19:14)—quite the opposite of the socialist ideal. Private possessions are described prophetically as existing in the future Millennium, as well, during which we are told that each man will sit under *his* vine and *his* fig tree (Micah 4:4).

These private possessions are not gifts from a state government, distributed based on forced confiscation and centrally assessed needs. Rather, so long as they are wielded in a godly fashion, the Eternal honors individual industriousness and skills (e.g., Proverbs 10:4; 13:4; 14:23) as tools for building wealth and gaining property. The Creator not only praises one’s willingness to work and earn, but also condemns being unwilling to work when one is able to do so, declaring through Paul, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). To those who “will not work” the Apostle says that “we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread” (v. 12).

Yet the sovereign God also establishes boundaries to such ambitions and self-interests, enforces limits to the accumulation of wealth and property, and *centralizes* authority over capital and the means of production to a degree that pure capitalism would not abide. Once Jesus Christ is enthroned and His servants glorified alongside Him, the “State” will be the Kingdom of God and its Omnipotent Ruler, Jesus Christ, and it will impose controls over the economy that will be enforced with divine power for the good of all.

For example, we see in the laws of God that owners of fields will not be able to do all they wish with what they grow: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleanings from your harvest. You shall leave them

for the poor and for the stranger: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 23:22). Jesus will have no qualms about His “government interference” in “private business”—He very much plans to enforce God’s laws and ensure opportunity is given to those who have none. In fact, every third year and sixth in cycles of seven, God’s law requires a tenth of all produce, live-stock, and income to be given to the “State” for distribution to the poor and needy (Deuteronomy 26:12–15).

There will be no arguments of, “Just let me keep it and I can turn it into even more!” There will be obedience and blessings, or there will be disobedience and curses.

God’s Law Resolves Economic Injustice

God’s word also recognizes the realities of economic abuse that socialism seeks to address. Under Christ’s reign, those who employ others will be commanded, “You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning” (Leviticus 19:13). Christ’s principle that “the laborer is worthy of his wages” (Luke 10:7) will be implemented fairly and justly; people will be paid fully and fairly for the work they perform.

What of the disabled or impoverished workers who cannot provide for themselves or their families in a purely capitalist environment? God will command in the Millennium that some situations are off-limits for seeking profit, such as when a brother or neighbor is in dire straits: “If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit” (Leviticus 25:35–37).

So, too, does God condemn those driven by greed to collect all the property and possessions they can. Even today He says to us in prophecy, “Woe to those who join house to house; they add field to field, till there is no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land!” (Isaiah 5:8). In fact, God created laws that prevent the permanent accumulation of additional land and homes, as in Leviticus 25:23–31, which requires those who buy land to let it be redeemed and reminds Israel that all fields and homes in unwalled cities revert to their original owners every 50 years.

In the Millennium, mankind will learn the truth it does not now recognize: Private ownership is, in reality, a *stewardship*, for it is *God Almighty* who owns all things. He declared to ancient Israel that “all the earth is Mine” (Exodus 19:5). Moses emphasized to the people in Deuteronomy 10, “Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it” (v. 14). All the earth “and all its fullness” belongs to Him (Psalm 50:10–12).

“‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Haggai 2:8).

Ultimately, no land or property is *truly* “privately owned,” *nor* is it the common property of all the people; it is *God’s* land and *God’s* property, and every human being will be held responsible for doing what pleases the Creator.

And that Creator will accomplish something Karl Marx or Adam Smith couldn’t. The Ever-Living One is the *true* engineer of the heart and mind! He will replace the human “heart of stone” with a “heart of flesh” and place His Spirit within those who accept it (Ezekiel 36:26–27). The tendencies toward corruption and selfishness that have plagued socialism and capitalism will be solved in ways human economists and policymakers never could: By transforming humanity from *within*.

The Only Perspective That Matters

Which humanly devised system ensures that the “good” succeed and the “bad” fail? Which one guarantees that the “powerful” are unable to unjustly benefit at the expense of the “weak”? Which one is able to balance human failings against themselves in a system of checks and balances so as to prevent societal rot and decay? None.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we must understand that God is not sending Him to earth to “globalize” any human philosophy. The millennial world we celebrate and meditate on during the Feast of Tabernacles will come about because Christ will finally set aside *all* of mankind’s ideas and implement *God’s* ideas. “For who has known the mind of the LORD?” Paul asks in Romans 11:34. “Or who has become His counselor?”

Tomorrow’s world will not be a “perfected version” of today’s world. It will be a *radically different world*. Jesus Christ will not have worked for millennia—sacrificing Himself for our sins, living His life within us to reproduce His own faith and righteousness, and guiding His Church for 2,000 years—just to return and set up a civilization based on “cleaned-up” human philosophies. He will institute the reign of heaven on earth! He will institute “just ordinances and true laws” (Nehemiah 9:13) and commandments that are “holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12). Christ longs not to enshrine the “pure” ideals of Karl Marx or Adam Smith, but *the laws of the living God*.

We must not let the spirit of this world infest us with a “passion” for the tools, philosophies, and systems of this world, for they will all pass away to make room for the way of God at Jesus Christ’s return (1 John 2:16–17). Let us not be champions of *any* broken, incomplete philosophy of this world. Let us rather be champions of the righteous reign of Christ to come, focusing our hearts and minds on His perfect laws, ways, and paths; then, when He does return, we will be able to join Him in teaching them to all of humanity. (LW)

Seven Keys for End-Time Endurance

By **Richard F. Ames**

Even as we strive to survive in a world of pandemics and economic crises, we're striving to fulfill the Great Commission. But we're all living in challenging times. Our hearts go out to those who have suffered because of COVID-19, which prompted a virtual economic shutdown around the world and many months of lockdowns for billions of people!

To put matters into perspective, the 2008 recession in the United States caused a shocking loss of jobs—2.6 million became unemployed in 2008, and it took four years or more for the economy to recover from that recession. During the COVID-19 crisis, the number filing for unemployment compensation reached more than 35 million!

How are we to respond and live our lives in these trying times? We strive to follow this admonition from the Apostle James: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2–4). Not that we falsely pretend that a trial *is* a joy, but we should rejoice in knowing God's power to use even the greatest trial for our benefit and growth. With this knowledge, we can respond to our trials with patience. How patient are you?

In the "love chapter," 1 Corinthians 13:4 says, "Love suffers long and is kind...." Love "suffers long" because we suffer the impositions, the handicaps, and the idiosyncrasies of our different personalities—but love is patient.

One of the key qualities of godly character is perseverance and patient endurance. Consider the patience of Abraham. "For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, 'Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.' And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise" (Hebrews 6:13–15). Brethren, just as Abraham patiently endured to obtain the promise, so must we.

How important is our need to endure? Matthew reminds us that "he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13). He's already talked about the beginning of sorrows and all of the prophetic trends—famines, pestilences, earth-

quakes—that are being fulfilled beforehand. He says that in spite of all the external turmoil and natural catastrophes, *you need to endure to the end*. So, brethren, we need to be like Abraham. He patiently endured, and God has called us to patiently endure and to persevere.

If you have a *New King James Version* Bible, you'll see the header "The Faithful Church" above these verses:

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, 'He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens': I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name" (Revelation 3:7–8).

That's true Christianity, and God has blessed us with His Spirit to make sure we are pure in heart, that we are fulfilling the spiritual magnification of the Ten Commandments. Jesus praises the Philadelphians, who

have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you (vv. 8–9).

We see that expression several times throughout the New Testament; God tells us that He loves us, and has loved us. Remember that always, especially when you're feeling down and are tempted to cry out, "No one loves me!" I probably said that at times when I was a teenager, and so have some of you at one time or another in your life. Well, I was wrong! God the Father always loved and loves us all, and so does our Savior, Jesus Christ!

One characteristic God praises in Philadelphians is their perseverance, their endurance. He promises to keep His most faithful people, who endure to the end, safe from the end-time trial we call the Great Tribulation (Revelation 3:10–11). God wants us to endure—but do we know how?

Think of the historic catastrophes that people have had to endure. Some of us who are older have lived through World War II, which devastated nations—and included the horrors of the Holocaust. Eighty years earlier, the American Civil War killed an estimated 620,000 young Americans, according to Bruce Catton's *American Heritage History of the Civil War*. Pestilence and disease have devastated populations in the twentieth century. You are aware of the influenza pandemic of 1918–1920 that killed more than 50 million people worldwide—but, surprisingly, even here in the United States, the pandemic of 1918 killed a reported 675 thousand people. In less than 60 years, from the time of the Civil War to the 1918 pandemic, almost 1.3 million Americans were killed by war and pestilence. Can you imagine? And now, counting COVID-19 deaths and others where the coronavirus played a decisive factor in death, more than half a million more Americans in little more than one year fell victim to a shocking new disease!

The history of the world demonstrates that the way of life practiced among peoples and nations has brought us untold misery, death, pain, and suffering worldwide. The world has yet to learn the consequences of vanity, jealousy, lust, and greed. How can we endure this end time? “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end” (Hebrews 6:11). We are to renew our repentance, and again, make sure that we are close to God, “that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (v. 12).

How do we endure to the end? We exercise faith and patience, and God says that we need to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Let's consider seven keys to end-time endurance. Some of these may overlap, but together they can help us think about how we are doing and how we can do better.

Seek First God's Kingdom

Our *first key* is to seek first God's Kingdom. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). Most of us know this by heart. But read the whole chapter—Jesus is admonishing His audience, *You have little faith*. What about us? Is something lacking in your faith? Then strive more to seek God's Kingdom, and what you lack will be added. And what is God's righteousness that we seek? As David proclaimed of his Lord, “all Your commandments are righteousness” (Psalm 119:172).

Seeking God's Kingdom and righteousness brings another great benefit to help us endure. “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:34). So keep your priorities straight, with God always

first. What “idols” are in your life ahead of God? You might want to watch Mr. Wallace Smith's excellent sermon “Bury Your Idols” at *LCG.org*. And Mr. Gerald Weston, our Presiding Evangelist, has lately been encouraging us to read—or re-read—Dr. Meredith's powerful booklet *Your Ultimate Destiny*. It should remind us of just what it means to be a firstfruit in the Kingdom of God. Here is just one inspiring and powerful excerpt, reminding us that

at the “last trumpet,” Christ will return to this earth as King of kings, and those found worthy will find themselves surging upward toward the clouds to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). They will have *spirit bodies* and will be glorified as newly “born” members of the divine Family! They will not be regarded as “adopted” or merely “created” beings. Rather, these Spirit-born sons will *come right out from God*, having His very *divine nature* just as surely as we in this life have the human nature and characteristics imparted by our human parents (p. 13).

Maintain a Positive Mind

This should give us great encouragement and hope, and brings us to our *second key*—to maintain a positive mind. Many of us have memorized an important passage in Philip-
pians on this point.

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. 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 (Philippians 4:6–8).

Dr. Meredith wrote *The Seven Laws of Radiant Health* years ago, and it originally had “Maintain a tranquil mind....” Later, he changed that to *maintain a positive mind*. So, I prayed for years for God to help me “maintain a positive and tranquil mind.” That's not just a passive approach; it is fine to reason with God (Isaiah 1:18). David challenged God in Psalm 6:5, *Who's going to give You praise in the grave if You let me die?* When you pray with thanksgiving, you can also explain to God your hopes and the reasons for those hopes. And God can fulfill our hopes in the most remarkable ways.

Remember the account of the Philippian jailer. The Apostle Paul and Silas were in prison.

Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed (Acts 16:22–26).

God blessed their positive attitude and answered their prayers.

Run the Race with Perseverance

Those answers help encourage us as we approach our *third key*—that we run our race with perseverance, buoyed by the examples of those who have gone before us. We read in Hebrews:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and

Jesus Christ died for us—but for three-and-a-half years of ministry, Christ showed the world what it meant to be a living sacrifice. **And although He knew what was ahead, He endured. He sacrificed His present for the future—for our future!**

let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Are you a man of faith? A woman of faith? A teenager of faith? A senior citizen of faith? Our Savior endured even the horrific torture of being nailed to a stake to be drained of His blood and His breath until the soldier pierced His side (John 19:34). He did not let the world, or His own suffering, distract Him from His goal. Sin so easily ensnares us if we do not focus on running our race, recognizing that each choice we make is a part of shaping our permanent character.

As mentioned above, when times are tough, we can plead our case before our God. Remember the example of Jacob wrestling with the One who became Jesus Christ. Jacob held on firmly to this God Being, who said to Jacob, “‘Let Me go, for the day breaks.’ But he said, ‘I will not let You go unless You bless me!’” (Genesis 32:26). Jacob persevered and God changed his name to Israel. For more on this point, I encourage you to listen to or watch Dr. Douglas Winnail’s helpful and motivating sermon “Philadelphian Perseverance.”

Pray for the Kingdom of God

Our *fourth key* is to pray for the Kingdom of God to come. Christ taught us what we often call the “model prayer,” which opens with the following: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9–10). Sometimes I just spontaneously pray that, and I hope you do, too. Sometimes, when you read the news or see some video of injustice, oppression, famine, or poverty, you can spontaneously say, *Father, Your Kingdom come! We don’t want to have this oppression; we don’t want to see people suffering, little children dying from famine! We want Your Kingdom to come!*

What is the next-to-last verse in the Bible? Revelation 22:20: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’” And then John, who wrote down the book of Revelation, answered, “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” Then verse 21, the last verse of the Bible: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

As we pray for God’s Kingdom to come, and about the reasons why Christ needs to return, remember that He needs to save the earth, to save humanity, to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, and to establish the Royal Family of God as well. “And now, little children, abide in

Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28).

Be a Living Sacrifice

Our *fifth key* is to be a living sacrifice. As a teenager, I had the idea that someday I would be a hero, that I would give my life for someone. But God wants us to be a *living sacrifice*, “holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1–2).

Jesus Christ died for us—but for three-and-a-half years of ministry, Christ showed the world what it means to be a *living sacrifice*. He did not put Himself first and try to please

Himself instead of serving others. And although He knew what was ahead, He endured. He sacrificed His present for the future—for our future!

Paul says we need to be a living sacrifice. We need to seek God's will in our lives every day. And we know how to become a living sacrifice. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). That doesn't usually mean dying—rather, we lay down our time. We give of our possessions, our prayers, our care, our service. Be a living sacrifice. If you haven't already, you might want to read my article in the May–June 2021 *Living Church News*, "How May I Help You?" We need to be responsive to others' needs and ready to serve as living sacrifices.

Exercise Patience

Our *sixth* key is to exercise patience. Again, some of these points overlap, and I mentioned patience at the start of this article even before the list of points. Let's now consider how King David talked about waiting patiently for the Eternal. "I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps" (Psalm 40:1–2). David went on, saying: "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart" (v. 8). Do you delight in doing God's will, even when His answer to your prayer hasn't yet come, while you strive to wait with patience and hope?

Another classic example of patience involves the calling of Saul, who became Paul. The resurrected Christ told Saul that he was going to suffer many trials. Writing to the Corinthian brethren, he catalogs some of the sufferings that he patiently endured:

Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:23–28).

Paul experienced amazing sufferings, and he endured. So can we, with God's help.

Always See the Big Picture

This brings us to our *seventh and final* key—one you've heard many times through Dr. Meredith, Mr. Weston, and all of God's ministers: Always see the big picture. The Israelites got their eyes off the Promised Land. They saw the giants and they forgot God. How do you see the big picture? Consider these words from the book of Psalms:

O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, who have set Your glory above the heavens! Out of the mouths of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? (Psalm 8:1–4).

What a beautiful picture! Isaiah also talks about the glory and the power of God: "All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless" (Isaiah 40:17). So, if we get a little anxious or have phobias or fears concerning the power of nations, just focus on God's power.

Dr. Meredith always encouraged us to see the big picture. In a powerful *Tomorrow's World* magazine article titled "Play God or Obey God?," He wrote:

The Bible itself tells us through Jesus Christ—the very Son of God: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). The Bible is often referred to as the "mind of God" in print. For it is the Big Picture principles of the way God thinks—the way the **Creator** thinks. That is **why** Jesus Christ told us to live by **every word** of God! (January–February 2016).

In conclusion, let's consider a promise God gives us through Paul. It's a promise that I've claimed, and I'm sure you have, too, when you've gone through serious trials and challenges:

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

As we've seen through the above keys, with God's help we can endure whatever trials we face, giving thanks that even in our worst trials God will be there, helping us not just survive, but even thrive as we go on toward perfection! (L)



What the Parable of the Sower Shows Us About the Last Great Day

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

The Last Great Day holds a wonderful truth that most professing Christians do not know—a truth that in time will give them hope of entering the Kingdom of God. Parables, contrary to what many professing Christians believe, hold truths couched in stories that hide their deepest meaning from those whom God has not called.

How appropriate, then, that in one of Christ's parables, the Parable of the Sower, we find powerful teachings about the Last Great Day and its importance for humanity. We read:

“Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” And He said to them, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Mark 4:3–9).

Jesus made that last statement because some listeners had ears to hear what He was saying, and some didn't.

The Purpose of Parables

Mark continues:

But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that ‘seeing they may see and **not perceive**, and hearing they may hear and **not understand**; lest they should turn, and their

sins be forgiven them” (Mark 4:10–12; cf. Matthew 13:10–17; Luke 8:9–10).

Jesus said that by using parables He was *intentionally* obscuring deeper truths from those not called to spiritual understanding, repentance, and forgiveness.

Continuing further, “He said to them, ‘Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear’” (vv. 21–23). Clearly, some could hear, and some could not.

But didn't Jesus come to reveal God's truth to the whole world? If so, why would He use parables to *conceal meaning*? Jesus said that though His disciples could know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, the average person could not—yet wouldn't preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God involve telling *everyone* the mysteries that the disciples were learning?

The answers to those questions help us understand one of the great meanings of the Last Great Day. Most denominations do not keep this Holy Day or understand its truth—but, if you keep this awesome day, you *can* understand.

Different Responses to Christ

In this parable there are four types of responses. The seed took root for a while with some, but died out for one reason or another. In only one case did the seed bear fruit. Indeed, in the experience of the ministry, we can recognize most new contacts falling into one of these four categories.

Some fall by the wayside, and Satan takes the word away from them. It could be lack of interest, opposition from a mainstream minister, or an acquaintance who says untrue things about God's Church; for whatever reason, they never really get started.

Some fall on stony ground and have no root. Often, new people are excited about what they first understand, but they don't study their Bibles. As a result, they lack a depth of understanding of their faith, and that faith withers and dries up when doctrinal trials—or personal trials—come up, like the heat of the sun in the parable.

Some seed fell among thorns “and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:18–19).

Happily, some seed falls on good ground—and produces much fruit.

Hearing and Falling Away

Sadly, some who are called never bear any fruit and eventually depart from their calling. The New Testament clearly warns against *falling away* like that, because it can and does happen! Willful sin can cost people their salvation because it shows an unrepentant heart. “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26–27).

Consider these additional scriptures in the book of Hebrews:

... Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.... Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.... For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end (Hebrews 3:6–14).

In the Bible—and also in the experience of the ministry—we find that many people hear and begin to understand the word but do not come to fruition. These people are responsible for what they know and reject. “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48). Willfully rejecting Christ’s sacrifice after having been cleansed of sins *because* of His sacrifice can cost eternal life. A willful sin is one that is *recognized yet unrepented of*.

Happily, God doesn’t stop working with people unless they fully harden their hearts against Him. We have seen quite a few people return to the body of Christ after having left the Church. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

But even if they don’t come to services just now, there remains hope for unconverted relatives and friends—and all others in the world. The Apostle Paul made clear that God

doesn’t want anyone to fail and has a plan for all humanity. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:1–4).

Ears That Do Not Hear

God isn’t calling everyone in this age. He tells us that He hides His truth from some and reveals it to those we might not expect. Jesus 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” (Matthew 11:25).

Paul explained further:

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the **hidden wisdom** which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God (1 Corinthians 2:6–12).

God has a plan that includes *all* people. In His goodness and mercy, God has made provision for those who—through their life circumstances, their personalities, or a myriad of other factors—are at risk of not coming to fruition, even if they are exposed to the truth. God knows that in this age, many people who

receive the word will fail, as in the first three categories of the Parable of the Sower. So, He tells them the truth in a parable, and they hear it, but He does not open their eyes and ears to understand. They do not “hear with their ears,” just as was prophesied (Isaiah 6:10). Jesus said twice, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!” The Father enables His Church to understand and draws us to Him.

Jesus said that by using parables He was intentionally obscuring deeper truths from those **not called to spiritual understanding, repentance, and forgiveness.**

Scripture states this plainly, but it remains an enigma to most who profess Christianity. Its meaning can be understood fully only in understanding the meaning of the Last Great Day. “For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all” (Romans 11:32). The Last Great Day pictures that “mercy on all.”

The Last Great Day

Here is an excerpt from a booklet put out by an evangelical group. It expresses a common error.

There are only two kinds of people: those who are named in the Lamb's Book of Life, and those who are not.... And the difference between the two groups? Simply this: somewhere along the line, the blessed ones who have been accepted by God as His children heard the story of salvation and responded by giving their hearts to Jesus... those who are lost have either heard and rejected or never heard the story. What a slim turn of events on which to rest the eternal fate of a human soul. Thank God that all it takes to go from “lost” to “saved” is the simple act of embracing Jesus (Rob Hoskins, *Only One Hope*).

How does this doctrine square with Romans 11:31–32 or with Matthew 13:11? In these scriptures, Jesus said that He *intentionally prevented* people from understanding so they wouldn't repent and wouldn't have their sins forgiven. Most who profess Christianity assume that God intentionally assigns to eternal hellfire all those who do not understand.

Yet Romans 11:31–32 said that He hid the word out of *mercy*.

Untold millions of children have died without hearing of Christ or the Kingdom of God. According to the horrific teaching that many have accepted, those babies and small children, along with their parents, are tortured in burning flames forever, just for being born in the wrong place or the wrong time. This terrible mistake not only blasphemes God as unjust, but over the centuries—and still today—has caused many to be discouraged or lose faith. Atheists cite it as a reason not to believe. Roman Catholicism has invented “Limbo”—the supposed abode of unbaptized children—but this is imaginative and unbiblical theology necessitated by their false doctrine.

God is not calling the whole world now, and His word says that this is because of His mercy. If you keep the Holy Days including the Last Great Day, you can understand how God will accomplish 1 Timothy 2:4, which states that He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Not all will accept it, but He certainly *desires* that they do, and will give all a full opportunity.

Three times a year, God's Holy Days teach us the good news of what Christ *did* (the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread), what he *is doing* (the Day of Pentecost), and what He *will do* (the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Last Great Day).

While Pentecost teaches us that God is calling His little flock in this evil age to be in the first resurrection (James 1:18; Revelation 14:4), the Last Great Day teaches us that everyone who has ever lived will have a full opportunity for eternal life. That opportunity will occur after the second resurrection, at the end of Christ's millennial Sabbath (Revelation 20:4–6).

The Miracle of Seeing and Hearing

Jesus said, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!” His converted disciples *see and hear*. If you are one of them, God opened your eyes and ears; He taught you His truth, gave you true faith, brought you to true repentance and baptism, and gave you His Holy Spirit. He set you apart—He *made you holy*. This is a *miracle* that happens to all whom God calls, and one God will perform for all who are willing to receive it. All who have ever lived and not been called will come up in the second resurrection, and they will then have their first opportunity for eternal life in God's Kingdom.

What a loving, just, merciful, righteous, and good Father and Savior we have! As Paul exulted in Romans 11:33, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”

We have a great blessing from God, as Matthew explains:

“And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Matthew 13:14–17).

Our seeing and hearing is a miracle! And the Last Great Day reminds us annually that God has promised that the rest of humanity will have it offered to them at the end of His millennial Sabbath. Always remember that your hearing and vision is a *miracle* and a *blessing*, and treat it as such. Let's be thankful for it—and use it! (LN)

Festival 2021: Worshiping God and Growing Together

By **Rod McNair**

The Feast of Tabernacles is just weeks away, and plans are nearing completion! God designed the Holy Days to be highlights of the year, as we gather to learn eternal spiritual lessons and grow closer to each other as brethren. In this article, we'll discuss why we prepare for the Feast and some of the specific guidelines that help us to truly enjoy—and bring joy to—this wonderful Festival.

The Feast of Tabernacles 2020 was no doubt a Feast to remember! While we anticipate that this year's Feast will be just as memorable, we hope the memories in 2021 are more about inspiring sermons and meaningful fellowship than about COVID regulations! As of this writing, however, COVID restrictions vary widely from country to country around the world. While we hope and expect conditions will allow for fewer restrictions this year, we must be flexible, realizing that God admonishes us to protect those at risk.

As we prepare to worship God at His Feast this year, please note the following items we all need to remember as we plan. And please stay tuned to the weekly *The World Ahead* updates, as well as posts on the Festival website—FOT2021.LCG.org—and messages from your Festival Site Coordinator for the most up-to-date news about COVID restrictions and policies for your Feast site.

Focus of the Feast: Not Just a Vacation!

The focus of the Feast is on worshiping God and learning to “fear the LORD your God always” (Deuteronomy 10:20). In addition to that, we are at the Feast to grow together as a family. While we do enjoy physical blessings at the Feast, the main substance of the Feast of Tabernacles is not to be an extension of our consumer-driven society! We are to come *out* of the world. Accordingly, plan to spend the Feast getting to know brethren you don't know. Work with others to serve other brethren. Share your blessings with others who have less than you have. Be careful not to fall into the trap of seeing the Feast as just a vacation.

COVID Guidelines: Government and Venue Regulations

At LCG Feast sites, we will follow national, state/provincial, local, and facility management guidelines regarding

meeting size, social distancing, and other measures legally in place for the purpose of curtailing the spread of COVID-19 (Romans 13:1). Feast coordinators will ensure that such requirements are explained to all brethren and guests attending the Feast site, to better enable compliance.

COVID Guidelines: Illness at the Feast

Attendees at the Feast who develop a cold or come down with flu-like symptoms *should not attend services or socialize with others while those symptoms persist*. This follows the biblical principle of quarantine. They may wish to take COVID tests, but keep in mind that such tests may not detect the COVID virus for several days. If they test positive for COVID, all those living in close contact should follow the principle of quarantine as well, not attending services or socializing with others, because they have been exposed.

COVID Guidelines: High-Risk Individuals

If you are in a high-risk category for COVID-19, have someone in your household who is, or otherwise have health concerns regarding COVID-19—perhaps due to local conditions at the Feast site, for example—and are concerned about attending the Feast in person, we encourage you to evaluate your own situation carefully and prayerfully. We will make every effort to provide remote worship options—online streaming and/or phone hookup—as needed.

Tithe of the Second Tithe

The “tithe of the second tithe” is a custom that the Church has followed for decades. The general principle is that, in the command to keep a Festival tithe, there is a mention of “the Levite.” What this means is that we should contribute a small portion of our second tithe toward the physical arrangements necessary to set up the Feast. This contribution is used to pay for hall rentals and other expenses associated with the annual Festival observances, as well as to help brethren with limited funds attend the Feast of Tabernacles. If you haven't yet sent your “tithe of the second tithe” to Headquarters, please do so. Your generosity is much appreciated.

Plan to Be at Opening Night

This year, the Opening Night service will be held on **Monday evening, September 20**. Brethren are encouraged to make every effort to arrive at their Feast site in plenty of time to attend this opening service at the beginning of the Holy Day that begins the Feast. As has been our custom for years, there will be a special DVD welcome message from Mr. Gerald E. Weston during this service. Be sure to check the Feast website or messages from your Feast Site Coordinator for the exact time of the Opening Night service at your site.

As You Travel, Beware of Bedbugs!

In recent years, bedbugs have made a comeback, especially in hotels at some popular vacation spots. Therefore, it is prudent to check the beds of your accommodations when you check into your Feast hotels. If you see signs of bedbugs, you should request a different room. Here is a summary from the United States Environmental Protection Agency on how to check your room for bedbugs. Essentially, one should look for physical signs of bedbugs, which include:

- Rusty or reddish stains on bedsheets or mattresses.
- Tiny dark spots (about the size of a “period” on a typed document) on bed sheets or mattresses.
- The actual bugs, themselves, in the seams of mattresses or cushions.

Bedbugs not only inflict painful and irritating bites, but also can travel back home with you and are difficult and expensive to eradicate. God can and will protect His Feastgoers from bedbugs if we are prayerful and vigilant. We also know that a prudent man foresees danger and takes precautions (Proverbs 22:3).

Before You Go... Take a Hymnal!

Brethren who don't have a personal hymnal are encouraged to bring a hymnal—one or two per household—from their local congregation's supply for use at the Feast. Please make sure that all hymnals are clearly marked as to which congregation they belong to. For those who do take any blue congregational hymnal(s), please be sure to bring the same hymnal(s) back to your congregation after the Feast, so that the number of hymnals returned to each congregation is equal to the number of hymnals taken.

Stay Healthy as You Prepare for—and Travel to—the Feast!

As we prepare to depart for the Feast of Tabernacles, it is not uncommon for many of us to push ourselves and compromise on sleep and diet. Then, when we finally get in the car, on the train, on the bus, or on the airplane, our bodies slow down and we get sick. In past years, this has resulted in some bringing the

flu or a cold to the Feast site and spreading it to other Church members. If we do arrive at the Feast feeling ill, it is important—for the benefit of our brethren, as well as ourselves—to avoid fellowshiping and attending services until all symptoms are gone. Taking measures to stay healthy and even improve our health before the Feast will mean we are more likely to arrive at the Feast in good health, and we will be physically and mentally better prepared to partake of the powerful spiritual food and fellowship that God is preparing for us.

What Is Appropriate Dress at the Feast?

As we prepare to be lights to the world at the Feast, it's good to review some basic principles about decorum and attire. When we look to the Holy Scriptures we find *definite instructions* about dress for both men and women—instructions that our modern societies have forgotten or ignore, as do even some members of God's Church unless reminded periodically. Jesus stated in a parable that some invited to the wedding supper will be *turned away* because they are *not dressed appropriately* (Matthew 22:8–14). While the parable is certainly spiritual in intent, Christ made His point using the fact that some occasions require appropriate clothing. Some people assume that, because God looks on the heart, He is not concerned about how we dress when we come before Him. They are missing the point that how we choose to dress is a reflection of what's in our heart. God's Church has taught for decades that, when we come to services, we are coming before the God of the universe and should dress in the best appropriate clothing we have, in order to show proper respect to Him.

In most modern cultures, coats, collared shirts, ties, and nice slacks are considered appropriate attire for men on special occasions. Jeans, T-shirts, tennis shoes, or other sportswear are simply not in good taste at Church services or other special occasions. This may vary in tropical climates, but in all climates there is a distinction between what is appropriate and what is not. The Apostle Paul explains that ladies should dress “in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation” (1 Timothy 2:9–10). This does *not* include the trendy and immodest apparel that is commonplace in our society today: short and/or form-fitting dresses, necklines displaying cleavage, strapless dresses, spaghetti straps, backless dresses, belly-baring tops, etc. These are simply not appropriate forms of attire for Church services—and many other situations!

We come to services to worship God, not to display our bodies. Something may be comfortable or acceptable in our modern society, but that does not make it appropriate at Church services. When people dress in a manner that attracts attention to their bodies, they present a distraction from the real reasons for being at services, and may put a stumbling block before others. Our challenge as Christian men

and women is to *come out* of this world (2 Corinthians 6:17) and *recapture* true values so we can be *lights* to a world that has lost its way (Matthew 5:14–16). This is especially true as we gather to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles—picturing Christ’s glorious reign on earth!

What to Wear at the Beach?

Appropriate beach attire is swimwear that is modest and in good taste. We must be guided by the two great commandments—to love God and love our neighbor (Matthew 22:37–39; Mark 12:29–31)—so as not to offend God or our neighbor by our dress at the Feast. Accordingly, following our Living Youth Programs policy, beachwear at the Feast for ladies should be a modest one-piece or a modest tankini (covering the midsection), and for the men, no Speedo-type suits except in cases where pool facility rules require them. As leaders in their family, fathers and husbands have a responsibility to teach and guide regarding what is appropriate and what is not (Ezekiel 22:26).

Food and Drink During Services

While much modern worship has become quite casual, with congregants even eating and drinking during church services, God’s Church teaches a different way. Refraining from eating or drinking during the service shows respect to the speaker and honor to God. Except for medical reasons and for very small children, food and beverages beyond water should not be brought into the seating area.

Caring for—and Watching—Our Children at the Feast

Children are a joy to parents and fellow Feastgoers. The Feast is great family time—and it’s inspiring seeing children attend the Feast with their families! But, parents, please remember that children are *not* permitted to run or engage in horseplay before, during, or after services where services are held. Children playing on the stage or near speakers and microphones can damage expensive equipment. Children darting in and out among fellowshiping brethren can cause falls. For the elderly, this can be especially dangerous, even life-threatening. (Ushers or deacons shouldn’t need to physically restrain children who are misbehaving—unless required to avoid injury—but they *should* tell them to stop.)

Parents have full responsibility for their children at the Feast of Tabernacles, including at services, and should always be vigilant about their location and activity. While precautions are taken, and there are activities for children, a Church meeting or event is not a childcare facility. The Church does not take responsibility for the care of children at Church meetings or events. Their absolute safety cannot be guaranteed. The ultimate responsibility for the care of children *always* remains with parents or guardians. Please ensure

that the conduct of your children is adequately supervised throughout their attendance, and that your children are fully under your control. Minors—those under the age of 18—should never be wandering around unsupervised.

Experience has shown that young children and teenagers pay better attention and therefore learn more from the messages when sitting with a parent than when sitting elsewhere. Therefore, it is the policy of the Church to have children and teens sit with their parents during services. An exception may be where an individual child or teen sits with a friend’s parents and family.

Show Love by Going Light on the Perfume

Some brethren have serious sensitivities to perfumes and colognes. Even being in the same room as someone with a lot of perfume or cologne can send some of our brethren to the Emergency Room. Let’s take extra care to show love to others by avoiding the use of perfumes and colognes at the Feast.

When You’re Expecting...

Women going to the Feast in the late stages of pregnancy can face unforeseen complications. If you are pregnant and will be due around Feast time, please exercise caution and discretion in deciding to attend the Feast. The Church’s long-standing recommendation is that you stay home from the Feast if your due date is around Feast time, for your sake and the sake of your unborn child. As in all matters of health, this is a personal decision that must be weighed carefully and prayerfully, and with the advice of your physician or midwife. The Church provides prerecorded sermons—on CD and posted online—for shut-ins, and you can avail yourself of those. Also, some Feast sites will provide livestream or call-in telephone service for members assigned to that site.

We Want to Know What You Think!

Every year we take a survey to gain valuable feedback from brethren attending the Feast. We will again have the Festival Survey available online, and will have paper survey forms handed out at the Feast. The web address for filling out the Feast survey will be *FOTSurvey.LCG.org*. We ask everyone at the Feast to be sure to fill out either the hard copy or the online version of the survey form during or soon after the Feast, as it provides us with helpful information to assist with Festival planning for future years.

This year’s Feast of Tabernacles will no doubt be an exciting and memorable highlight for God’s people! As we gather together, let’s remember why we are going—to “learn to fear the LORD” always (Deuteronomy 14:23). Let’s be grateful for the Feast and the opportunity to draw closer to our Father—and each other—at this special time. ^(LN)



North Carolina Men's Training Camp 2021: To Lead and to Follow

By **William Williams**

From June 10–12, the Living Church of God held another Men's Training Camp (MTC) at the peaceful Blowing Rock Conference Center in the mountains of North Carolina. Over the weekend, 49 men from nine different states gathered to fellowship and learn together. The cool and rainy weather in this region of the Appalachian Mountains provided a welcome break from the usual Carolina summer heat as the men reunited with friends and family from congregations as close as neighboring South Carolina and as distant as Washington state, and the atmosphere was enthusiastically positive.

Mr. Jonathan McNair coordinated the efforts of Messrs. John Strain, Lenny Bower, Wyatt Ciesielka, and Rod McNair, who served as the teaching team. Mr. Gerald Weston, visiting the MTC for the first time, participated in the activities and gave the concluding address on Sunday.

The theme chosen this year at the North Carolina MTC was “followership”—learning to become better leaders by understanding the value of being better *followers*, from the perspective of both respecting authority and submitting to God in an increasingly godless age. This theme combined well with the principles that have guided the MTC since its inception: honoring God, building bonds of brotherhood, and education. These have been the foundational principles of the camps since Mr. Jonathan McNair began conducting them in 2014. This year, Mr. McNair shared some of the history of the program and how it has progressed since its rustic beginnings as a men's informal camping weekend.

Humble Beginnings

“As some of the other men and I in the Northeast region began to talk about having a weekend for men in the Church to get together and go camping, it occurred to me that we were leaving some men out. Some men would love to spend a weekend with other men but were not able to go camping and hiking. So I said, ‘Let's think differently about this, and plan a *spiritual boot camp* rather than just a camping experience.’ Instead of just focusing on outdoor skills, we can focus on spiritual skills. And if this was going to be accessible to all the

men in the congregation, we needed to think beyond just focusing on ‘leadership’ and emphasize the challenge of simply being a Christian man in a world that wars against that very concept. If we can be good solid Christians first, the leadership component will fall into place naturally.” Mr. McNair was determined to provide an opportunity for men of a wide range of ages and backgrounds to fellowship, learn together, and encourage each other in the Christian way of life.

“It was also important to make the activity accessible in terms of time. Many of our men do not have time off work after they use their vacation days for the Holy Days. So, we determined to run the activity from Friday evening to noon on Sunday, so they can get back home in time to prepare for work on Monday.”

For the first couple of years, Mr. McNair organized camps at different locations throughout the Northeast to accommodate different congregations. However, he quickly realized that the men in the Northeast “enjoyed it so much that they wanted to be at every camp,” instead of attending the ones in their respective parts of the region! At that point, a central location in the region was established for the activity.

As more men heard about the activity, guests from throughout the United States began to come to the Northeast to participate each summer. “One goal was to develop a template so that other pastors who felt their area would benefit from a program like this could replicate the Men's Training Camp themselves.” Guests included Messrs. Bill Long, Rick Stafford, and Bob Rodzaj, who each pastor their own area. Mr. Long and Mr. Rodzaj have each conducted a Men's Training Camp in their area, and Mr. Stafford hopes to follow suit. Mr. Stephen Elliot, pastor of several congregations in the Southwest, led his local men in hosting an MTC just outside Phoenix, joined by Dr. Jeff Fall and Mr. Jonathan Bueno. Mr. Adam West has continued the tradition of conducting the program in the Northeast region, assisted by pastors Mr. Michael Aviles and Mr. John Hunter. Mr. Rod McNair has conducted MTCs in the Charlotte area, as has Mr. John Strain, with the support of Mr. Lenny Bower. From Headquarters, Dr. Douglas Winnail, Mr. Michael DeSimone, and, most recently, Mr. Gerald Weston, have all attended and participated in Men's Training Camps.

Mr. McNair emphasized the importance of including elders and pastors in the teaching sessions. “It’s key to have other ministers involved. The men benefit from multiple perspectives focusing on our theme from different angles rather than me doing all the talking all the time. To be successful, the activity needs to be interactive, it needs to address real-life issues, and it needs to be focused on biblical guidance for the challenges we face as men.”

“A Rolls-Royce Is Always Going to Be a Rolls-Royce”

In terms of the MTC today, and specifically this year’s camps in Wisconsin and North Carolina, Mr. McNair said he hoped to establish a solid standard of success and to avoid the attitude of making each year “compete” with the last. “A Rolls-Royce is always going to be a Rolls-Royce” he said, as the program strives to offer something “a little bit different” each year, while maintaining the high standard of quality, value, and camaraderie that participants have come to enjoy.

That focus was noticeably strong at Blowing Rock this year, and Mr. McNair observed that “the guys really dug into the application and practice of the subject—how to be strong and courageous followers. Mr. Weston also seemed to really enjoy getting to meet and getting to know the men better.”

One participant said:

The 2021 Men’s Training Camp was a tremendous blessing for me, and I truly thank Mr. McNair and all the LCG ministry and staff that made it all possible. The two things that made the biggest impact on me were, first, diversity in ages and experiences of all the men in attendance, from fourth-generation members... to first-generation men who were just recently baptized—all of whom recognize the importance of being godly men. Secondly... humility and patience is so important in being a good follower and how my example, as a follower, affects how my family and those in my congregation feel towards the leadership in the Church and towards each other.

Another participant called the MTC “an awesome amazing opportunity that God gives us to train to be submissive to Christ.... It is like a giant Spokesman Club meeting, held in one full learning and practicing weekend, [almost like] a mini-Feast! Learning to bond together better as brothers, sharing experiences to help each other with know-how to fight in the spiritual battles we face—it takes us as good followers to keep it going.”

Though the theme for 2022 is sure to be different, participants are looking forward to more of the same excellent work and fellowship next year! 

Upper Midwest Men’s Training Camp 2021

Fifty-one men, ranging in age from 16 to 91, from seven midwestern states, enthusiastically assembled June 11–13 for the Upper Midwest Men’s Training Camp on the shore of picturesque Delavan Lake, in southeastern Wisconsin. Presentations, workshops, interactive breakout sessions, and split sermons that I gave along with Messrs. Gene Hilgenberg, Richard Franz, Mark Sandor, and Brian Pomcier addressed a variety of topics. They included the societal challenges facing men, fulfilling our Creator’s intent, making a contribution to the Body, defending the truth, organization and time management, building a strong marriage,

understanding the challenges our children are facing, and mentoring the next generation. The topics were deliberately need- and issues-driven, based on a pre-camp questionnaire that allowed the men to bring up challenges they face in fulfilling their roles.

Delicious, relaxed meals and free time provided plenty of opportunities for the men to mix, share their stories, build bonds, and support and encourage each other, which they did heartily. After the event, feedback was requested from the attendees. One wrote, “The presentations at the Camp are a ‘goldmine,’ providing me with encouragement, information, perspective and direction.” Another commented,

“I was able to make some great connections throughout the weekend that would not have been possible if I did not attend a weekend like this.” One man summed it up this way: “The event invigorated me to keep pushing myself to be a Christ-like man in all aspects of life. To me, the event theme was ‘aligning to God’s creative intent for men’.... When we align ourselves with God’s intent, that really becomes the solution to the challenges men face in this age.” The men left reinforced in their roles, armed and ready to apply what they learned and to be the kind of men, husbands, fathers, and Christians God wants them to be.

—Bob Rodzaj

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Mew are pleased to announce the birth of their daughter **Lillian Kate Mew**. Weighing eight pounds and measuring 52 centimeters, she was welcomed into the world on February 10. Mother and daughter are well. Dad and

brother Sammy are thrilled to have a lovely addition to their growing family, and the Brisbane, Australia, congregation also welcomed her with joy.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. Yvon (Angèle) Brochu celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on July 31. Mr. and Mrs. Brochu came to the truth in 1975 and have been faithful members of God's Church for decades. Mr. Brochu is a longtime elder, serving French-speaking brethren far beyond their home congregation of Quebec City in Canada through sermon videos, and is also a presenter on the French-language *Tomorrow's World* program. The brethren truly appreciate the fine example of love, faithfulness, and friendship they consistently show to one another as well as to others, serving the members with joy and care. Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Brochu!

Mr. and Mrs. Walter (Eunice) Montgomery celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on June 22. Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery, both baptized in 1973, have touched many brethren with their love, pleasant and happy ways, and outgoing concern for others, including their

willingness to share the story of their life, how God called them, and the many miracles He has worked in their lives. They are a fine example of a strong, loving, and serving couple in the Winnipeg, Manitoba, congregation in Canada.

Mr. and Mrs. John (Audrey) Robinson celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary on June 30. Both growing up in God's Church, they were baptized in 1996 and 1992 respectively. Mr. Robinson was ordained an elder in 2011, and currently serves the Headquarters Editorial Department as Managing Editor. With their two daughters, Mr. and Mrs. Robinson attend and serve in the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation, exemplifying Christian balance, service, and hospitality. Congratulations on 25 years of marriage!

Mr. and Mrs. Edward (Velma) Stringer celebrated their 58th wedding anniversary on June 7. Mr. and Mrs. Stringer

are longtime members, coming to God's Church more than 40 years ago. Mr. Stringer is a deacon in the Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, congregation in Canada, and together they serve the brethren with energy and care. This pair of travelers, photographers, hosts, and capable organizers exemplify love, joy, and faithfulness. Congratulations!

Mr. and Mrs. Peter (Carol) Wiebe celebrated their 57th wedding anniversary on June 20. Mr. and Mrs. Wiebe were baptised in 1964 and 1966 respectively and attend the Winnipeg, Manitoba, congregation in Canada. Their teamwork and joy in being together is evident and refreshing and is a fine example, especially for younger couples. Both tirelessly serve the brethren as deacon and deaconess. They are a wonderful example to all who come into contact with them. Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Wiebe on a wonderful milestone!

ORDINATIONS

Mr. Fred Ziegler was ordained a deacon on the Sabbath of June 19 by Area Pastor Richard Franz. Mr. Ziegler serves in the Rolla, Missouri, congregation.

In Loving Memory

Mr. James Porter, 94, died on February 3. Born in Scotland, he moved to Australia in 1982 with his wife and family. Mr. Porter was baptized in 1968 and ordained a deacon in 2008, serving faithfully in the Perth congregation. He was a very generous man and helped the brethren wherever he could. His wife of 57 years, Grace, also a member, predeceased him in 2011. They were both wonderful examples of living God's way of life. Mr. Porter's family held a memorial service for him and it was mentioned that both his and his wife's last words were "Thank you."

Mrs. Celina St. Pierre, 89, died peacefully on June 7. A kind and gentle lady, she was not able to attend services with the

Moncton, New Brunswick, congregation in Canada for the last few years due to illness. In her younger years, she loved cooking and would prepare visitors' favorite dishes when she knew they were coming. She will be missed by one daughter, three sons, five grandchildren, one great-granddaughter, and the brethren who knew her.

Mrs. Magda Taylor, 69, died February 12 after patiently battling cancer for many years. Baptized in 2011, she was a beloved part of the Perth congregation and the Brisbane congregation before that. She is survived by her husband Christopher and family.

New *Tomorrow's World* TV Commercial Builds Awareness of God's Work



God's Work has been making great strides in recent years, furthering awareness of the true Gospel by taking advantage of whatever technologies and media platforms show promise for doing the Work. One of our most recent advertising efforts is a televised commercial for the *Tomorrow's World* magazine, which features brief comments from several Church members and highlights many of the magazine's qualities. With God's help, the results of this advertisement will determine how we can advertise even more effectively in the future.

"Television advertising is a powerful avenue to explore with a lot of potential," said Mr. Mike DeSimone, Manager of Broadcast Media at LCG

Headquarters. "These ads get us in front of literally millions of people multiple times, and because TV ads build trust and awareness like nothing else can, they get people ready to take action—order literature or respond in another way—when they see us on other platforms or mediums like the 30-minute telecast on television, Facebook ads, YouTube ads, etc. We are still refining the YouTube ads—they have a long way to go, but so far they are relatively effective."

"Gary Jones, an elder in Kansas City, sparked the original thought," Mr. DeSimone said. "Steve Cegelski was also very helpful in understanding various aspects of television commercials. The idea is that we can get in front of a lot of people for a very low cost. If even a very small portion of people respond and get the magazine, the commercial can be very effective for us."

Even the telecast will benefit from the experience of creating this new advertisement. "Hiring a professional crew was great for our Headquarters TV crew," Mr. DeSimone added. "Watching the professionals work, seeing their equipment, being able to get their input—it was extremely valuable overall, and has already directly influenced a few aspects of our work that will be reflected in the telecast."

—Editorial Staff

Electronic Service Requested

If It Were Easy...

There were five kids in my blended family, and my stepfather was a genius at keeping all of us busy doing productive things. When we were kids, fun came *after* chores and maintenance projects. The usual tasks, like regularly mowing the lawn, trimming hedges, and raking leaves, grew in time to include adding another room to our home, painting the house, stripping hardwood floors for waxing, and painting and wallpapering an upstairs apartment.

As teenagers, if we stayed out past when we were supposed to be home, he would not fuss about it; he would simply get us up an hour or so earlier than usual to accomplish whatever tasks he had for us that day. About mid-morning, he would say, “I hope you had a good time last night, but next time you might want to get home when you are supposed to, so you don’t have to get up so early!” As you might imagine, we complained bitterly about the difficulty of our many chores. He would listen, then respond with, “Boys, if it was easy, everyone would do it—but very few do!” We heard that often.

We learned valuable life lessons as we tackled difficult projects, along with skills that would serve us well as adults. My stepfather was a tough taskmaster, and as a young person I thought he was a tyrant. Later, I realized that he was preparing us for life. Before he died at a good old age, I thanked him for being willing to put up with our complaints as he accomplished his purpose, pushing us out of our comfort zones to learn to work and do productive things.

My siblings, too, were all molded by these experiences, and the resulting work ethic and “can-do” attitude accomplished much good in our various endeavors throughout the years. I think we all have looked back with gratitude that, unlike so many, we were taught how to live a productive life. This can parallel the description Jesus gave of the Christian life when He said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13–14).

Choose the Right Path

Most people choose the path of life that leads to the “broad way.” Only a few choose the narrow gate, which is to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). What is “righteousness”? The psalmist wrote that “all Your commandments are righteousness” (Psalm 119:172).

Those who choose the difficult way will encounter many obstacles and distractions to be overcome. As the Apostle Paul explained to the evangelist Timothy, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). If we desire to live the Christian way of life, we will always be going upstream, against the current. As a Christian, one cannot “go with the flow.”

The many projects I undertook in my youth required perseverance to complete, and the same principle applies to the Christian life. Jesus said that “he who *endures to the end* shall be saved” (Mark 13:13). If it were easy, everyone would do it—but very few do.

—J. Davy Crockett III