

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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Stay on the Road!

Dear Brethren,

More than 50 years ago, an Ambassador College professor made a rather colorful statement that has stuck with me ever since: “People tend to fall into one ditch or another. The only time they are in the middle of the road is when they are on their way to the ditch on the other side.”

If we are honest with ourselves, we see a lot of people in one ideological ditch or another. Of course, we rarely, if ever, see *ourselves* off the track. We rarely see ourselves as others see us. I have occasionally made the honest observation that while I recognize that I am not the most balanced person in the world, I have yet to find anyone who displays greater balance. I hope you can recognize a little self-directed humor in that observation, because it agrees with Scripture: “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts” (Proverbs 21:2)

That is how our minds work: *If I think it, it must be right.* But, again, if we are honest with ourselves, we admit that we have been wrong about many things, even things about which we once felt very strongly. The man who cannot admit this has deceived himself, for, as another proverb says, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise” (Proverbs 12:15).

Human nature is the same today as it has always been, but our world is *not* the same. Today, we face challenges that tempt our human nature to a degree unimaginable to past generations. The Internet and social media offer an all-you-can-eat buffet of conspiracies, political agendas, and misinformation as never before. There have always been conspiracy peddlers and fake-news purveyors, but their ideas were never so readily at our fingertips. Solomon wrote that there is no

end of books, but even he had no idea—and, if it were only books, at least it would take people time to read them. Today, you can endlessly read snippets from strangers giving their opinions as if they were documented facts.

Consider some of the more popular conspiracies of the last six decades, most which came along even before the Internet: *The Illuminati are controlling the world. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated at the behest of the Mafia, Fidel Castro, the Soviets, the CIA, etc. Man never landed on the moon. The secretive HAARP project is causing earthquakes and a host of other “natural disasters.” Chemtrails are controlling our climate. The September 11 attacks were a plot by the U.S. government, not Arab terrorists. COVID-19 is a grand hoax involving Bill Gates, Hillary Clinton, George Soros, and anyone else on your list of disliked persons. Adolf Hitler did not commit suicide, but escaped to Argentina. Marilyn Monroe was killed by the Kennedys, and Elvis Presley is still alive and well in an Alabama trailer park!*

With such a list as this, I am sure I have managed to step on almost everyone’s foot! Okay, I admit it: I still have questions about the JFK assassination. And when it comes to COVID-19, I do not claim to have all the answers. But, frankly, brethren, some of you are stuck in one ditch or the other—and you may drown if you don’t get out before the rain comes. We need to be wise and balanced. For instance, there is no serious dispute about whether COVID-19 is real. It is, and it is a killer. But are some numbers exaggerated? Probably. Are there politicians and bad actors who are using this crisis to promote their agendas? No doubt. Will pharmaceutical companies cash in big-time? Absolutely.

But does this mean that every government leader we disagree with is acting only for personal gain and is not at all

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concerned for the people being governed? Mr. Herbert Armstrong visited scores of government leaders around the world and came to appreciate the struggles each one had in governing their citizens. He personally knew many men and women of national authority, when most of us have never even known one such leader. Mr. Armstrong was hardly naïve regarding the character of politicians and dictators, yet he realized that many do care for the countries and citizens they oversee—and he never got caught up in those nations' politics. Instead, he kept his eye on the reason God called him—to preach the Gospel and warn the world about where it is heading.

Lessons from the Exodus

As I bring out in this issue's Editorial, the Exodus contains many lessons for us. Every year, during the Days of Unleavened Bread, most of our ministers will at some point turn to 1 Corinthians 10 to remind us of the sins of the children of Israel—which turned the desert into a graveyard. The list of sins includes idolatry, lusting after evil things, sexual immorality, tempting Christ, and complaining (vv. 6–10). And Scripture reminds us that “all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (v. 11). So, we must be aware of these things, and of the two causes underlying these sinful behaviors.

Moses is larger-than-life to us today, but he was not so revered by the children of Israel. Because the Israelites lacked faith, they could not trust that God was with them and was leading them through Moses. He was just another man.

The book of Hebrews addresses the first underlying cause: “Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that

they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:17–19). Belief and faith in God is a theme of Hebrews. The book's entire eleventh chapter addresses the subject of faith, and warns us that “without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (v. 6).

Moses is larger-than-life to us today, but he was not so revered by the children of Israel. Because the Israelites lacked faith, they could not trust that God was with them and was leading them through Moses. He was just another man. *How carnal those Israelites were*, we may think. *How foolish they were, after all those miracles! How could they murmur and complain so much?* Again, as I have described in the Editorial of this issue, those were thoughts I once had—but no longer. The Israelites complained because they did not know where their food and water supply would come from. They complained because they were told to go into a land filled with giants. *But we never complain, do we?*

The second underlying cause sprang from their lack of faith, and from their trust in their own judgment over God's. That is why God admonished them, at the end of 40 years, “You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes—for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 12:8–9). This character flaw remained with them to greater and lesser degrees all the way down to the time of the judges (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

These two underlying causes brought destruction to Israel over the course of its early history, and we see little difference in human nature today. It is one thing to *profess* faith in God and His word, but a different matter to *exercise* faith when God's word conflicts with our cherished opinions.

Get Out of the Rabbit Hole

Scripture tells us that Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22–23). And we are informed

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EDITORIAL By Gerald E. Weston

To the Overcomers

We are reminded each year of God's amazing plan for us individually and collectively as we observe the biblical Festivals of God. Think about that:

Only a precious few people in all of human history have known the true meaning of life, and you are among them! How exciting it is that we are given the opportunity for eternal life as the literal divine children of our Creator—and how wonderful that every human being who has ever lived will eventually have that opportunity!

As time passes, however, we can easily come to take the lessons and meaning of these days for granted. Can you still remember your first year or two in the Church, when these Festivals were first explained to you? I certainly can. My first Passover remains etched into my mind—where I was and some of my thoughts at the time. The same is true for the Night to Be Much Observed—and I'm sure it is the same for most of you. That next evening after Passover, marking the start of the Days of Unleavened Bread, was filled with jubilation as we heard a message about Israel's escape from Egypt and how this related to the beginning of our personal journey out of sin and towards the promised reward.

The earliest sermon I remember hearing during the Days of Unleavened Bread was about Israel's sins that kept them out of the Promised Land—especially their sin of murmuring. I thought, *How blind and lacking in faith they were after seeing such great miracles that brought about their liberation!* While they were physically brought out of Egypt, their hearts and minds were left behind, still in bondage. I wondered, *How could they be so foolish?*

What my naïve mind found incredible then is no longer so unbelievable today. We see the same sins being committed right before our eyes. Miracles do not sustain faith for long. Too many individuals—though thankfully not all—experience a genuine miracle but then fall away from where God is working. Some forget the miraculous and “rationalize” a physical explanation, when none seemed to make sense at the time. Others “rationalize” that the miraculous happened because of their own righteousness and that they no longer need to associate with those who are “less faithful.” At other times, it is a matter of being

offended and allowing bitterness to set in, creating a breach between the individual and the ministry through which God is working (Hebrews 12:15). Bitterness blinds the eyes, as John warns us: “But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:11). Whatever the reason, miracles alone do not sustain faith to stay the course. This is a powerful lesson from the Exodus, one that we rehearse each year during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Reading and hearing examples from the Exodus is the right first step to learning the lessons they hold, but unless we are moved to change our behavior, we miss the point. As James tells us, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22–25).

Yes, there is a blessing that comes from looking into the mirror of God's word, recognizing where we need to change, making those changes, and remembering to maintain them going forward. So why do so many come up short? Before answering that question, let us review the scriptural warnings given regarding the Exodus.

The Missing Meaning

Cecil B. DeMille's epic movie *The Ten Commandments* depicts the spectacular miracle at the Red Sea, but how many who have viewed that scene over the last 65 years understand the greater *significance* of the event? It is there for anyone to read: “I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1–2).

There was water above and water all around—a watery grave, as the Egyptians learned too late. But, for Israel, their enslaved life in Egypt was buried in the sea and they commenced a new life on the other side. Paul reminds us here in 1 Corinthians of this

often-overlooked fact—and follows with the overall lesson that baptism is only the *beginning* of our journey out of sin and into the Kingdom of God.

Another little-understood truth is that the One who became Jesus Christ was with the children of Israel, just as He oversees our lives and provides for our needs today. “[A]ll ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (vv. 3–4). While this is not new to most of us, how often are we satisfied with technical *knowledge* while neglecting to *act* upon the truth? Knowledge is *not* enough—we must “practice the truth” (1 John 1:6).

Israel was continually thrown off guard when things did not happen the way they thought they should. They went three days without fresh water, and at other times there was no meat except for their limited flocks and herds—which, for whatever reason, they did not want to slaughter. When put in these situations, they judged by the sight of their eyes, failed to see the Rock that followed them, and took out their fears and frustrations on the men God was using to lead them.

Do You Trust in Jesus Christ, the Living Head?

There is something important about the way Paul lays down his message. Do we ever forget that this same Rock who pro-

Do we ever forget that this same Rock who provided for Israel’s needs—on His timetable and in the manner He chose—currently leads the Church as the Head of the body of Christ?

vided for Israel’s needs—on His timetable and in the manner He chose—currently leads the Church as the Head of the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22–23)? We read this, but do we truly believe it? These are easy words to profess, but when things do not work out as we individually think they should, do we exercise faith in Him, or do we fall back to trusting in ourselves? Just as Israel could see no further than Moses and Aaron—human leaders—many today fail to recognize who is the living Head of the Church as He leads His body through flawed human beings. How hard it can be to see beyond men!

It is easy to see this error in the children of Israel—but *do we recognize it in ourselves?* There is a *huge* difference between administrative decisions and apostasy, but when something does not go the way we think it should, it is easy to claim the latter to justify rebellion. Yet we are warned, “A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment. A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart” (Proverbs 18:1–2).

The history of the Church of God shows a disturbing pattern similar to the Exodus: “But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness” (1 Corinthians 10:5). How many tens of thousands have begun the journey with a joyous baptism, but failed to remain faithful? No doubt many were called to support the Work without ever fully “getting it.” We can hope that their opportunity will come in the second resurrection, but that is not for us to judge (John 5:22).

Paul warns us twice in 1 Corinthians 10 that we would be wise to learn from the example of the Exodus. “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). When he speaks of the “ends of the ages,” is he not speaking directly to us? He gives this same warning in verse 6, but attaches to it a specific failing—violation of the Tenth Commandment. “Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.”

There are many evil lusts, but it is sometimes not the *object* of one’s desire that is wrong, but the intensity of that desire. For Israel, ingratitude for what God was giving them was coupled with their desire to satisfy their cravings. “Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!’” (Numbers 11:4–6). Even so, God provided meat in the form of quail for them—but their lust and gluttony, shown by their actions, soon brought destruction upon them (vv. 31–34).

Aaron’s Miraculous Calf

Israel also gave in to idolatry in the famous event at the bottom of Mount Sinai when Moses “delayed” in returning. It is shocking how quickly they forgot all that had gone before, but are we any different today? We certainly like to think we are, *but are we?* Consider this pandemic and how quickly it has caused some to forsake doing the Work of God over masks and *temporarily* refraining from singing. It does not take much to “upset our own apple carts!”

Consider also how quickly tens of thousands of Church of God members cast aside all that they had learned after the death of God’s servant Mr. Herbert Armstrong. Yes, that took more than 40 days, but many made nearly instantaneous reversals on individual doctrines when told they could. After a three-hour sermon by Mr. Armstrong’s successor, they cast aside the Sabbath. After another sermon,

they went out that very evening to dine on unclean meats. These were not matters of administrative decisions on how to keep God's Sabbath during an unusual circumstance, but casting aside His Sabbath altogether—along with His Holy Days, His food laws, and so much more. It all happened in a short period of time.

One form of lawlessness leads to more lawlessness (Romans 6:19). If Israel's calf was not evil enough, the nation's behavior was worse. The Israelites offered sacrifices to the calf, held a feast in its honor, and "rose up to play" (Exodus 32:6). What does the expression *rose up to play* mean?

After Aaron gave a most pitiful excuse to Moses for

what had happened, claiming that he had cast the gold into the fire "and this calf came out" (Exodus 32:24), we find that their worship of the calf included "unrestrained" singing

and dancing (vv. 18–19, 25). And Paul warns us, "And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play'" (1 Corinthians 10:7). It is evident from all this that the children of Israel had reverted to an unrestrained form of dancing. I have occasionally said of some of the dancing I've observed at weddings and other occasions that the only thing missing is the golden calf! There is a lesson in this for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. After all, is that not what Paul tells us (vv. 6, 11)?

This clearly led into Paul's next warning: "Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell" (v. 8). One interesting point in this warning is that God's wrath is not always immediate. The sexual immorality that is referred to in this verse is mentioned in Numbers 25, where we learn that "the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab" (v. 1). This did not happen in a single day, but the result was God's wrath descending on "twenty-four thousand" Israelites (v. 9; the discrepancy between 1 Corinthians and Numbers is easily explained by 23,000 dying in "one day" and another 1,000 subsequently).

But if there is one lesson we ought to learn from the Exodus, it is found in 1 Corinthians 10:9–10, which says that the Israelites tempted God with their lack of faith and complaining. Many sermons have been preached on this subject over the decades, but one must ask, "To what avail?" Murmuring or complaining appears to be a characteristic of human nature and, try as we might to avoid it, it crops up far too often. So, how do we solve the problem? We will get to that, but first let us look elsewhere in 1 Corinthians for a

couple of other lessons regarding Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Puffed Up

This first letter to the Corinthians was written around the time of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread and so contains many lessons related to these days. In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul uses three times the unusual expression "puffed up" (vv. 6, 18, 19). Bread puffs up when yeast is introduced to the dough. 1 Corinthians 5 again uses this unusual expression (v. 2), which is also found in two other places in this letter (1 Corinthians 8:1; 13:4)—yet the remainder of the Bible has

only two such references (Colossians 2:18; 1 Timothy 3:6). Paul drives home the God-intended lesson of unleavened bread when he reminds the Corinthians that they

are to put out the "puffed-up" old leaven of malice and wickedness and replace it with the unleavened, humble bread of sincerity and truth (5:8).

We also read that the Passover was "party time" for at least some members in Corinth—a time for gluttony and drunkenness. They totally missed the sober significance of Passover (1 Corinthians 11:17–34). They failed to comprehend what it meant for Christ to be our Passover (5:7), and Paul warned them that there were consequences for eating and drinking the symbols of Christ's suffering in an unworthy manner (11:29–30).

What to Do?

This article has explained very little that most longtime Church members have not heard before, but have we truly *gotten it*? If not—and that applies to far too many—what can we do to *get it*? The answer is found in a simple but too-often-neglected tool for spiritual growth: meditation. It is too easy to read something without taking the time to think and deeply consider how it applies to the self. If you have a problem of complaining, consider spending a few minutes at the *beginning* of each day thinking about *why* you complain, *when* you are most likely to complain, *what* it is that you are likely to complain about, and *what you need to do to overcome that habit*. Focus on overcoming the problem, ask for and accept God's forgiveness, and talk to Him candidly about this sin.

Meditation is clearly a neglected tool for overcoming. Each day, consider what it is that you are trying to overcome, reminding yourself that you can do so with God's help. And always remember that it is the overcomers who will make it to the Promised Land (Revelation 2–3). (LN)

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Godly Discipline

By **Richard F. Ames**

As you examine yourself, preparing for the Passover, can you say that you have grown as a Christian in the last year? Or are you treading water, or even going backwards? The good news is that God not only wants each of us to grow, but also gives us what we *need* to grow. But it is up to us to use what He gives.

One valuable tool He gives us, which He wants us to develop more and more, is discipline. We all need to develop godly discipline in our lives. As followers of Jesus Christ, this is especially significant. As Dr. Jeffrey Fall wrote in *Successful Parenting: God's Way*, “Christ’s early followers who were being trained in the Way of life were called ‘disciples.’ The word ‘disciple’ is derived from the word ‘discipline.’ Christ taught the disciples; He encouraged them, and sometimes corrected them. His goal was to train disciples who could live and teach the Christian discipline (the Way of life)” (p. 16).

Mr. Herbert Armstrong knew the importance of discipline. In his “Seven Laws of Success,” the first law is to set the right goal. To set the right goal requires discipline so that you don’t just go from fad to fad, but focus on your real priorities. The second law is to educate yourself. Education requires discipline so that you apply yourself to your studies and learn what you need to learn. The third law is to maintain good health—again, requiring discipline. The fourth law, “Drive yourself,” is another way of saying “Stay disciplined!” The fifth law is to apply resourcefulness, which is a kind of discipline. The sixth law, to persevere toward your goal, also requires discipline. And the seventh law, to seek God’s continual guidance, is the most important discipline of all. Do your best, but always trust in God and put Him first. If you aren’t familiar with Mr. Armstrong’s seven laws of success, you may want to read “Seven Laws of Success” in the March 2021 *Tomorrow’s World* magazine.

What Is Discipline?

Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary says that discipline is “to train by instruction and control (1 Cor. 9:27). The biblical concept of discipline has both a positive side (instruction, knowledge, and training) and a negative aspect (correction,

punishment, and reproof). Those who refuse to submit to God’s positive discipline by obeying His laws will experience God’s negative discipline through his wrath and judgment.”

As Christians, we gain discipline as we learn to practice God’s way and obey His laws. We have our part in God’s plan of salvation. We need to persevere, we need to have discipline, and we need to trust God to complete the work that He has started in us. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:24–27).

Yes, discipline helps us form good habits in our lives. Athletes are very disciplined. One golf instructor at the Summer Education Program in Big Sandy, Texas, taught a principle for success at golf: “Rhythm, pace, and balance.” That principle has been helpful to me ever since—not just in golf, but in other areas of life.

We also need to be disciplined about our health. Dr. Meredith wrote *The Seven laws of Radiant Health* many years ago. What were the seven laws Dr. Meredith enumerated? Eat a proper diet, get the exercise your body needs, get enough sleep, get sunshine and fresh air, wear clean and appropriate clothing, avoid bodily injury, and maintain a positive attitude. Are you following all of those laws? It takes discipline to do so, but the benefits are well worth it.

Discipline is also necessary to succeed in the fine arts, in business, and in our education. The different areas of study in school are often called “disciplines”—they each have specific standards, practices, and measures of success.

Sometimes it can be hard to maintain the focus, the discipline, that we need in order to succeed. But we need to remember that discipline is a positive characteristic. In Dr.

Fall's booklet on child-rearing, he stresses the importance of discipline. As parents instill discipline in their children, they are giving them a foundation for a life free of the unnecessary pain and suffering that come with an undisciplined life.

Spiritual Discipline

The most important area of discipline, of course, is the spiritual. We know Christ's promise that "he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13). Jesus Christ endured terrible suffering in order to become our Passover Lamb. What about us? Are we becoming weary, or are we developing the discipline to endure? "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him'" (Hebrews 12:3-5).

Not be discouraged when He rebukes you? That can be hard—I know that I sometimes don't like to be corrected. But remember what Jeremiah wrote: "O LORD, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing" (Jeremiah 10:24). We shouldn't hide from correction, but we can pray that God delivers it with mercy so we can learn our lessons the easy way, not through suffering.

In fact, we should feel *encouraged* when we receive God's correction. Remember that "whom the LORD loves He chas-

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tens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?" (Hebrews 12:6-7). God is letting most of the world go its own way in this age, and most aren't listening to any warnings He does give them. But God loves His people as a father loves a son. You are special to Him. If you are feeling discouraged, you may want to go to *LCG.org* and watch Mr. Gerald Weston's inspiring sermon "Be of Good Courage."

As Christians, we know that it is our duty to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior (2 Peter 3:18). To do this, we discipline ourselves spiritually by being consistent in prayer, Bible study, fasting, and meditation. We read, "As for me, I will call upon God, and the LORD shall save me. Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:16-17). Are you praying

consistently? We should have an attitude of prayer without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Even facing the threat of the lion's den, Daniel prayed three times daily (Daniel 6:10). If we spend time every day in wholehearted prayer, we can be confident of bearing the spiritual fruits of God's Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

We also need to discipline ourselves to fulfill the mission of God's Church—to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and to fulfill the Great Commission of preaching the Gospel to the world. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

Character and Discipline

When I served in the United States Army more than 60 years ago, we had a song: "For the hardest blow of all, is to hear the bugler call; you've got to get up, you've got to get up, you've got to get up this morning!" You don't want to get up, but you're in the army and the trumpet sounds—you've got to get out of bed. We all need to have that discipline and drive. We look forward to a different trumpet, but the idea is the same. We need to stir ourselves now!

Spiritual discipline is vital if we want to develop God's holy and righteous character in ourselves. Who in the Bible had godly character, and how was it demonstrated? Abraham was going to follow through with his obedience to God by sacrificing his own son, "But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' So he said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me'" (Genesis 22:11-12). God knew Abraham and called him His friend. What does God know about you and your character? Does God know that you fear Him, as He said about Abraham? How predictable are you, and are you striving to attain righteous character?

To achieve God's character is voluntary. You need to want it and you need to understand that you have surrendered totally. Sometimes when I counsel individuals for baptism, I say, "Look, you are giving your whole life to God, and you're giving your time to God. If you're going to be baptized, you are totally committed, you are totally surrendered. You can't say, 'Oh, I am totally committed, but I want five seconds of my own time to do my own thing.' And you can't say, 'Well, yes, I'm going to give You, Holy Father, my whole body—except for my little finger.' No, it's got to be 100 percent of your time, 100 percent of your body, 100 percent of your will."

Yes, character itself is a gift from God, but we have our part in the process of *developing* that godly character. How often do you think about David's prayer of repentance? "Create

in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:10–11). This should be our approach as well.

Four Steps to Godly Discipline

We can break down into four steps the process of developing godly discipline. The world around us basically dismisses the whole first step, and as a result cannot go further. But we can go further—and, as Christians, we must. The first step in developing godly discipline is to **be willing and able to know what is right and what is wrong**. There *are* absolutes in our lives, values on which we should never compromise. When God opens your mind, you see that the Ten Commandments are the framework for godly life.

The second step is to **commit to doing what is right**. As we discussed above, that’s a 100 percent commitment, not that we can decide to only commit “around other people” or “on the Sabbath.” We won’t succeed perfectly, especially at first, but we must commit to the goal and strive to do our best—with God’s help and His indwelling Holy Spirit—to do what we know is right.

The third step is to **resist temptation**, just as Jesus resisted Satan (Matthew 4; Luke 4). You may have heard the saying, “Character is what we do when no one is watching.” Of course, God is always watching and we cannot fool Him. If we have a proper fear of God—awe and respect for His power, majesty, and unmerited love for us—we will not think that we can reject God’s guidance yet still develop His character.

The fourth step is to **practice what is right** until it becomes part of our very nature. God created you to reflect and radiate His holy and righteous character. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

It is interesting that the Greek word translated as “workmanship” is *poiema*—we are His “poem,” His work of art, His masterpiece. Yes, we are the masterpiece of God’s creation, and we are finishing a work God has begun in us. He cannot by fiat create His holy and righteous character in us without our cooperation—but with godly discipline, we can cooperate with Him to develop that character.

Overcome Through Discipline!

Admiral William H. McRaven, a Navy SEAL for 36 years, wrote in his book *Make Your Bed*, “If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed.” It is easy to talk about the importance of discipline, but it starts with the smallest details. If we fail to develop discipline in how we handle the small things in our lives, we won’t develop the discipline to handle the big things (Luke 16:10).

Thankfully, if we practice it daily, we will grow in godly discipline, which will lead to the abundant life Christ has promised us (John 10:10). We can shine our light in a dark world and turn many to righteousness by our example (Daniel 12:3). If you haven’t already seen it, you may want to watch Mr. Weston’s powerful sermon “Faith to Be a Light in a Darkened World.”

No, God has not called us to change the world now, but rather to proclaim the coming of the time when Christ will establish the Kingdom of God on the earth to bring about the real and total change it needs. But in our individual lives, as we recapture true values in all we do, others will see in our discipline, in our character, that we in God’s Church are experiencing the very Kingdom of God in embryo. Dear brethren, as you examine yourself in preparation for the Passover, ask yourself how well you are growing in godly discipline. Pray for the gift of godly discipline and then strive to implement it in every aspect of your life!

As the Days of Unleavened Bread approach, brethren, I hope you are reflecting on Christ’s awesome gift of salvation! The Passover powerfully reminds us of that gift and the awesome sacrifice of His Son. The Days of Unleavened Bread reveal our part in God’s plan of salvation and teach us the ongoing need to overcome self, Satan, and society. Through His Spirit, God gives us the power of discipline to aid us in the process of overcoming. Romans 8, often called the “Holy Spirit chapter” in your Bible, encourages us that “in all these things we are *more than conquerors* through Him who loved us” (v. 37).

God has called us to be overcomers and conquerors, a destiny He emphasizes *seven times* in the second and third chapters of Revelation.

Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. *He who overcomes*, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Revelation 3:11–13).

Brethren, let’s rejoice in God’s awesome plan of salvation revealed through the annual Holy Days and Festivals. Let’s “stir up the gift of God” (2 Timothy 1:6) and exercise the gift of spiritual discipline. Let’s follow the example of Paul: “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27). Thank God for the gift of discipline and strive to *practice godly discipline* as we prepare for the Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, and beyond! (LN)

Passover: By Any Other Name?

By Jonathan McNair

For many in traditional Christianity, the term “Passover” refers to an observance for the Jewish people. They might intuitively sense a connection between the symbols they take during a “communion” service and the Passover observed by Christ and His disciples, but they would not consider the ceremony in which they participate a “Passover.” To them, Passover is not for Christians, and was only observed by Jesus and His disciples because they were Jewish men who kept Jewish observances.

On the other hand, some professing Christians acknowledge the Passover’s symbolic importance, but prefer to use different terms to divorce the Passover, which Christ commanded in the Old Testament, from the New Testament observance instituted later. Here is one Protestant explanation of this:

The bread and wine is not a Passover. At Jesus’ Last Supper, the meal was a Passover meal; the sharing of bread and wine was done *after* the supper, and Scripture does not call it a Passover. What does Scripture call it? It does not give a formal name. In 1 Corinthians 10:16, Paul calls it a “cup of thanksgiving.” In verse 21, he calls it “the cup of the Lord” and “the Lord’s table.” Since Scripture does not require a particular name, Christians are free to use any term that helps them understand that they are talking about the sharing of bread and wine in commemoration of Jesus’ death (“Questions and Answers About the Lord’s Supper,” *GCI.org*, retrieved January 26, 2021).

The explanation goes on to defend the use of three terms to replace “Passover”: “Communion,” “Eucharist,” and “Lord’s Supper.” Let’s scrutinize these replacement terms that are so familiar to the average Protestant or Roman Catholic today, and consider whether it is correct to use any of them.

“Communion”

Mainstream Christianity commonly uses the term “communion” to describe the act of receiving a small wafer of bread

and a small amount of wine, symbolizing the body and blood of Jesus Christ. But is “taking communion” a term that has the stamp of God’s approval? Is this an appropriate or accurate phrase to use? Let’s turn to Scripture and see.

The English word “communion” appears in the *New King James Version* four times. We find it first in 1 Corinthians 10:16, where we read, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” The Greek word *koinonia*, from which “communion” is translated, simply means “*joint participation*” or “*fellowship*.” When two people *communicate*, they *participate* in an exchange of ideas. That is fellowship or joint participation, which is exactly what the above verse is emphasizing. It is not advocating a substitute or replacement for the term “Passover.”

How about 2 Corinthians 6:14? We find the English word “communion” here as well: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” Again, the word is certainly appropriate here, since righteousness and lawlessness have no joint participation—but, again, the term has nothing to do with the Passover.

The last instance in which the English word “communion” is found in the *NKJV* is in the very last words of Paul’s second letter to the Corinthian brethren: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen” (2 Corinthians 13:14). In other words, Paul encouraged his brethren to take heart in the “fellowship” of or their “joint participation” in God’s Holy Spirit. This is a perfectly appropriate conclusion to his letter, but it, too, has nothing to do with Passover.

But did Paul instruct Corinthian brethren regarding the Passover? Yes, he did. And what terminology did he use? He wrote, “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:6–7).

Paul understood that Christ was directly connected to the scriptural Passover, and he emphasized that fact in his

writing. In fact, as we look at his second letter to the Corinthians, we read some very specific instructions about the proper keeping of the Passover.

It would logically follow that if Christ were initiating a new and improved term for Passover, He would have used that new term at least once. But He did not. And if the Apostles had believed it was important to replace the term “Passover” with “communion,” would they not have given that instruction? Yet they did not. So, why would we conclude that Christ, the Word, the communicator of His will through the Holy Scriptures, wants us to replace “Passover” with “communion”?

In fact, the word “communion” has served only to distance the Roman—and later Protestant—observance from the historical and biblical Passover.

“Eucharist”

Is it appropriate for us to call our service, in which we take the symbols of the body and blood of Christ, “the Eucharist”? Where did the practice of referring to the Passover symbols and observance as the “Eucharist” begin? Here’s an entry in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* that explains:

Among the early Christian writings outside of the NT the Didache, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, and Justin Martyr’s *Apology* deserve to be studied as witnesses to the Lord’s Supper. In these writings the technical term for the Lord’s Supper is *eucharistia*... a word which took the lead in Christian tradition for a long time and which is still, as in the past, dominant in Catholic circles (vol. 4, p. 363).

Mainstream Christianity has taken the term “Eucharist” from a Greek word, *eucharisteó*, which refers to the giving of thanks. Their idea is that Christians “give thanks” over the wine representing Jesus’ shed blood, for which they are indeed thankful.

But is it appropriate and correct for us to use “Eucharist” as a replacement for “Passover”? *Not at all*. In fact, the Greek word *eucharisteó* never appears in the Bible in that way. While we should have an attitude of thanksgiving toward God, and certainly for the sacrifice of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we are nowhere given permission to replace the meaningful, historic, and prophetic term “Passover” with the term “Eucharist”! To do so is to take to ourselves the authority to blur the meaning of the Passover and impudently divorce the Old Testament from the New.

“The Lord’s Supper”

How about “Lord’s Supper”? Should we be using that term? Where did it come from?

Let’s look at 1 Corinthians 11, in which the phrase “the Lord’s Supper” appears. There are two sections of this chapter upon which to focus. Verses 17–22 highlight a problem that was occurring in Corinth, and verses 23–34 record Paul’s instructions to correct the problem.

As you read through the first section, it appears that the brethren in Corinth were continuing to observe a meal in conjunction with the Passover while assigning Christ’s title to it. In the early days of the New Testament Church, understanding which specific activities should be continued and which had been superseded was a challenging concern. The issue of circumcision is the most well-known example, but it appears that Paul was addressing another issue in this letter: How should the Church observe the New Testament Passover? He used this opportunity to give a clear answer to that question. But notice how he first addressed the way in which they were conducting themselves. He wrote:

Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you (1 Corinthians 11:17–22).

These are powerful, corrective words. He chastised them for bringing the characteristics of the culture around them into a setting that should have been filled with love, fellowship, and respect. In fact, such scathing criticism runs throughout this letter. But in giving his guidance in correcting the problem, Paul didn’t focus on changing the name of the Passover. Instead, he followed the example of Christ (Matthew 26:26–30) and pointed his brethren to new symbols that emphasized the fulfillment of the Passover. He moved their attention away from the meal and gave important instructions for New Testament Passover observance:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remem-

brance of Me.” In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

Paul chastised the Corinthians for the way they were conducting themselves at this meal. But, more importantly, he used the occasion to teach them to keep the New Testament Passover properly. The Passover was not about the meal. The meal was a remembrance of an event that was a part of the history of physical Israel, full of prophetic meaning foreshadowing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As Christ fulfilled that sacrifice with His body and blood, redeeming all of us from the sentence of death, He introduced the symbols of the bread and the wine, commanding His disciples and those who would follow to use those symbols to rehearse this lesson each year.

To review, the emphasis here is not on any change of terminology, but rather on correction of what the Corinthian brethren were doing and on pointing them towards the New Testament Passover—with all its symbolism and import for those under the New Covenant.

An Instructive Timeline

Another point is worth considering as we analyze whether we should think of and refer to the Passover observance as “Passover” or by some other term. This point has to do with chronology.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians around 55 AD, mentioning Christ as the fulfillment of the Passover and correcting the Corinthian brethren about their observance. He also discussed the Days of Unleavened Bread. A few years later, around 60 AD, we find in the first gospel writings the consistent use of “Passover”—and no change in terminology! The events pertaining to the Passover and Christ’s crucifixion were so important that Matthew dedicated ten chapters to them. Later, Mark added six chapters and Luke included about five-and-a-half chapters. In 60 AD, these three men wrote about Christ—His life and His preaching, what He was all about—and they mentioned *nothing* about any sort of change in terminology for the Passover. Instead, they *reinforced* the keeping *and the terminology* of the Passover.

Let’s move forward ten more years, to about 70 AD—we find that Paul again mentioned the word “Passover” in Hebrews 11. Then, in about 90–100 AD, the Apostle John in his gospel referred to the Passover more than any other writer, making nine explicit references to it according to the *NKJV*. He used almost half of his gospel to write about the Passover, the crucifixion, and the short period of time just before Christ’s crucifixion and death. Yet, in all that detailed discus-

sion of this time made newly important by Christ’s sacrifice, we find none of these new terms used at all! Despite ample opportunity to introduce “new and improved” terms to replace “Passover,” we find that no such change was endorsed by Christ or His Apostles!

Why “Passover” Is Important

In Scripture, the term “Passover” first referred to a historic event. But as the Israelites were instructed in the details of how to keep that first Passover, little did they know that virtually every instruction given to them pointed to Christ and the establishment of the New Covenant (Exodus 12:1–14). The Israelites were protected and “passed over” by the death angel, giving them a new lease on life through the covering of the blood on their lintels and doorposts. We are likewise given life—eternal life—through the covering blood of Jesus Christ. The lamb “without blemish” pointed to the perfect, sinless life of Christ. The fourteenth day of the month of Abib (the month later called Nisan) anticipated the very day on which He would be crucified. The way the lamb was to be prepared and eaten pointed to the completeness of Christ’s sacrifice.

The fact is that the first, crucial step in God’s plan for all of humanity is revealed through the Passover. When apostasy began to enter the Church and leaders began to distance themselves from God’s command to keep the Passover—using different terms and conducting the ceremony on any and every day they chose—they lost sight of God’s plan. As terms such as “eucharist,” “communion,” and “Lord’s Supper” came into vogue, instead of bringing God’s plan into sharper focus, they blurred the meaning of the true Passover and God’s instructions for keeping it. That meaning has been blurred so much that, today, most churchgoers would not consider Passover anything but a Jewish ceremony.

The Passover, described in detail in Exodus 12, has a depth of meaning far beyond one night of terror for the Egyptians. Every aspect of the observance of that first Passover pointed directly to the One who would not only fulfill it, but introduce symbols that would even more clearly reinforce its lesson for those under the New Covenant. To use alternative titles and descriptions, designed to intentionally blur that connection, undermines our understanding of God’s design and plan.

There are critically important reasons why we call the ceremony memorializing Christ’s sacrifice “Passover” and not just any term that we wish to use. And, in fact, using other terms to replace the word “Passover” undermines and obscures the true meaning of this important ceremony. As we in God’s Church prepare to observe the New Testament Passover in just a few weeks, let us rejoice in the knowledge that God has given us, and in the true meaning of this wonderful annual event! (L)



What Could Turn You Back?

The pull of spiritual Egypt is more powerful than many believe.

By **Wallace G. Smith**

The Spring Holy Days often prompt us to meditate on the exodus of ancient Israel from Egypt, and for good cause.

On the last Day of Unleavened Bread, the Israelites found themselves on the side of the Red Sea *opposite* the land of their suffering and slavery. God, having miraculously parted the waters and guided them through under Moses' leadership, brought them out of Egypt in victory. As they stood victorious beside the water, singing joyfully and praising their Creator, the bodies and war horses of their oppressors washed up dead on the shore behind them. The sorrows of Egypt's slavery, cruelty, and death were past, and the land of promise, "flowing with milk and honey," was before them. They only needed to keep on walking forward.

Yet, on the doorstep of the Promised Land, God records in His word the cry of their lips: "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt" (Numbers 14:4).

It might seem unfathomable that any of them could want to go *back* to Egypt—back to the land where they lacked even the strength to prevent their oppressors from throwing their newborn sons into the river to die.

Unfathomable—but it happened just the same. And it can happen to us. Sin, like Egypt, is cruel to us—yet, as Passover teaches, God the Father and Jesus Christ were willing to pay the ultimate price to free us from it. And "if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). As did Israel, we stand on the other side of our *own* Red Sea, free to march forward to a "Promised Land" so much more glorious than the one offered to ancient Israel.

But how many begin that journey, freed by Christ, only to choose to go back—to return to spiritual Egypt? Far too many. Sadly, the pulls of spiritual Egypt are strong, and *many* of those whom God calls find themselves caught up again in the carnal mindsets, sinful practices, and ruinous entanglements of the "course of this world" (Ephesians 2:2).

How does that happen? This is an important question, since if it has happened to others it can happen to us. So, what could possibly turn us back? What forces—what pulls, influ-

ences, or circumstances—could cause any of us to turn our back on God's promises and gaze longingly once again on any of the things from which Christ freed us?

Let's examine three powerful reasons why some turn back to Egypt.

Loss of Vision

In order to keep moving forward to our own "Promised Land," we must have vision. It takes vision to perceive the invisible God intervening in the affairs of the world around us, working within the Church, guiding the Church's human leadership, and making Himself visible through His laws and Way of life. It takes vision to keep the future Millennial reign of Christ—and the eternity beyond that Millennium—first in our minds and hearts, when the present world around us tries to demand so much more of our attention. It takes clear vision to see this world for what it really is, and to stay close to God, not being fooled by the pleasing and attractive "front" the world places before our eyes.

Moses is a good example for us. As tempting and pleasurable as his life in Egypt was, he still chose to suffer with his people—God's people. In doing so, "he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as *seeing Him who is invisible*" (Hebrews 11:27). Moses' vision let him see the Eternal God behind the temporary world around him. Yet, for a brief time, even Moses' vision of God was compromised by his irritation with the Israelites' constant complaining, causing him to err and to miss out on entering the Promised Land (Numbers 20:10–12).

We, too, may find the strength and clarity of our vision waxing and waning, depending on our circumstances. Yet we must strive to be on a *trend* of growth of vision. As we mature in faith, we must strive to let God show us the truth about this world, the wonders of tomorrow's world, and His own reality more and more fully. Why? Because a loss of vision can be devastating—the path back to Egypt begins with a vision that is warped, corrupted, or lost.

Loss of vision turned Paul's companion Demas back to the world and back to spiritual Egypt. Demas must have endured many difficulties while working with Paul. Wherever

Paul and his companions traveled, trouble was often there waiting for them! Yet, although he mentions Demas positively in two of his letters—in Colossians 4:14 and in Philemon 24, where he is described as a “fellow laborer”—Paul later writes to Timothy that “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). Demas failed to recognize that when we put our focus on “this present world” and close our eyes to its corrupt and impermanent nature, we lose sight of the future world God is bringing and the future life He will manifest in us.

This problem is as old as the Israelites. After crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites sang the “Song of Moses.” As the dead armies of the Egyptians were washing up on the shore behind them, they looked ahead to the land of promise awaiting them, singing that “all the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away” and God would plant His people “in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which You have made for Your own dwelling” (Exodus 15:15–17). At least for a moment, the Israelites had a clear vision of God’s ability to protect and provide for them in a new land.

Sadly, as they came closer to that land, their vision quickly faded, and growling stomachs began to obscure their view. “Who will give us meat to eat?” they cried. “We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic” (Numbers 11:4–5). Memories of the slavemaster’s whip and the wholesale killing of their children gave way to a hunger for Egypt’s culinary delights. Instead of thanking God for the manna, they cursed it as insufficient (v. 6), failing to remember that it was meant only for the *journey*—it was the land to which they were *headed* that had so much more in store, such as abundant milk, honey, grain, wine, livestock, and oil (Deuteronomy 11:9–15).

Losing their vision of God as their provider, they also lost sight of Him as their protector. On the very doorstep of the Promised Land, the Israelites who once sang that the land’s inhabitants would “melt away” before God were suddenly filled with fear:

“If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” So they said to one another, “Let us select a leader and return to Egypt” (Numbers 14:1–4).

Having lost their vision of the Promised Land and corrupted their vision of their past life in captivity, Israel longed to turn back to Egypt.

Do we, too, when our vision falters, begin to long to turn back? As we walk the path God asks of us, do new hardships

tempt us to forget what our old lives were like without Him? Are our busy modern lives so cluttered that we cannot see past the clutter and picture the coming Kingdom of God and the glorious purpose God is working out in our lives? Or have we simply lost sight of God Himself—unaware of the work He is doing within us to cultivate the character, mercy, and love of His own Son, unable to see how He is creating inside our hearts a glory He will one day reveal on the outside?

If we are not careful, elements of our carnal nature and unconverted past may begin to appear more attractive and appealing than before, until—sooner than we ever could have imagined—we find ourselves walking back to Egypt.

Pride and Ambition

Another powerful influence that turns many back to their own spiritual Egypt is the same force that turned the archangel Lucifer against his Creator: pride.

Personal pride and ambition can make it very difficult for us to walk in the direction God seeks to lead us. God’s path for us may lead through many warm and welcoming places as well as some callous and cold. Yet, regardless of the terrain, it is a path that must be walked in *humility*. Personal pride and selfish ambition can turn people aside more quickly and completely than any other test of faith.

Just as physical forces pull in specific directions, sinful pride tends to pull us toward the opposite of where God would have us go. Its pull was strong enough to corrupt one of God’s greatest angels, who worked in the very presence of his Creator. As Paul warned, pride can bring upon us “the same condemnation as the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6), and selfish ambition is the opposite of the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:3–5).

Israel had its share of the prideful and ambitious, who were ready to lead the people of Israel off the path God had shown them. Yet it is easy to overlook just how “normal” such individuals might have seemed to us, and how much esteem we might have felt for them if we had been there. Consider what happened when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram confronted Moses, alongside “two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown” (Numbers 16:1–2). That description, “men of renown,” is important. These were respected men, held in high esteem by the people of Israel.

Perhaps it was that esteem and appreciation of their personal qualities that corrupted them from the path, as Satan’s own sense of himself did to him (Ezekiel 28:17).

Challenging the leadership of Moses and Aaron, these men confronted the pair—not by saying that they were turning away from God, but that they had every bit as much right to lead God’s people on His behalf. “You take too much upon yourselves,” they said, “for all the congregation is holy, every

one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" (Numbers 16:3).

This is important to recognize, because the road back to Egypt does not always *look* like the road back to Egypt. These men spoke of God. They spoke of the holiness of the people and of God's presence among them. And they cast Moses and Aaron as the prideful ones who dared to take a place they claimed God had given to others. But Moses' admonition to them was plain:

Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also?" (vv. 8–10).

Moses acknowledged that these men had been called by God to be leaders among His people and to serve in a special way. Yet he also spelled out the nature of their sin: In their eyes, such blessed positions of leadership and service were apparently "a small thing," and they coveted more, even the whole priesthood. Their complaint superficially sounded like a concern for the things of God, yet God saw it for what it was—sinful pride and selfish ambition.

Filled with ambition, Korah and his co-insurrectionists saw Moses and Aaron as obstacles between them and their own personal goals and desires. As a result, they could no longer see the Eternal Sovereign who had appointed those men and stood behind them. The rebels claimed to be standing against Moses, accusing him of "acting like a prince over us" (v. 13). In fact, however, as Moses told them, "you and all your company are gathered together against the LORD" (v. 11).

So distorted by pride were the minds of these men that they began to describe *Egypt*, not the Promised Land, as the land "flowing with milk and honey" (Numbers 16:13). Had they been allowed to lead Israel as they desired, how long would it have been before a return to Egypt made its way to their agenda?

The New Testament Church had its share of prideful characters as well. The Apostle John wrote of Diotrephes, who loved having a preeminent position, yet who spoke against John with "malicious words," causing division (3 John 9–10). John would have been very aged at the time, and even today we see "young Turks" arise from time to time who esteem their new ideas and ambition above any

potential weight of wisdom that the "old guard" might provide. Filled with the zeal of the young and self-satisfied, pride prevents them from seeing that one may be both 100 percent zealous and convicted and 100 percent wrong (cf. Romans 10:2).

Our "Jeremiah 17:9 hearts" will seek to convince us that our goals are noble and our purposes selfless—but acts of selfish pride and ambition *usually* feel that way to the prideful and ambitious. And they always lead in the same direction: back to spiritual Egypt. At all scales, large and small—whether positions of great power and influence or the simplest acts of service to another human being—we must be wary of exalting ourselves. Rather, to stay on the path to our reward, the Apostle Peter urges *humility* as a necessary ingredient, reminding the young to submit to the older and all to submit to each other, emphasizing that "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

Hurt and Resentment

If the devil has favored any tool more than all others in his effort to turn members of the Church of God back toward Egypt, that tool is likely *personal offense*. This may well have spurred one of the most famous historical accounts recorded in the Bible. Most of us are familiar with King David's adulterous affair with the wife of Uriah, one of his faithful mighty men. David's sordid affair with Bathsheba caused him to arrange Uriah's death in battle—which he clearly hoped would be seen as an accident—so that he could quickly marry Bathsheba himself and his child she carried might not serve as evidence of his sin. Scripture tells us simply, yet ominously, that "the thing that David had done displeased the LORD" (2 Samuel 11:27). 2 Samuel 12 then details the resolution of the matter—which included the tragic death of the child and God's use of the prophet Nathan to help David find repentance.

Actually, "resolution" is too strong a word, for the effect of David's sin rippled through his life and the history of Israel. We see this in the rebellion of David's son Absalom. The terrible tale of Absalom, his sister Tamar, and his half-brother Amnon reveals enough bitterness that we can imagine the role it might play in Absalom's later coup.

And there is another subtle detail to be found in the account. It is hard not to notice Ahithophel's *personal* level of involvement—not only advising Absalom to sleep with all of his father's concubines to show the depth of his division with David (2 Samuel 16:21–22), but also asking to *personally* lead men to strike the king down while he is "weak and weary" (2 Samuel 17:1–3). Some speculate that Ahithophel's betrayal spurred Psalm 55, in which a heartbroken David laments the treachery of one who was "not an enemy" but a "companion" who had taken "sweet counsel" together with

him and walked with him among God's people in worship (vv. 12–14).

What could have turned one of David's most trusted allies 180 degrees, such that he would try to destroy David's name among the people and personally seek his death? One hint comes in a perhaps-unexpected place. In one of the lists of David's mighty men, we read of "Eliam, the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite" (2 Samuel 23:34). And when we read of the lineage of Bathsheba, we read that she was "the daughter of Eliam" (2 Samuel 11:3). These are the only mentions of an Eliam in the Bible, and they imply that Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather.

Is it conceivable that seeing a man, even a close friend, use his position and privilege to upend your granddaughter's life—committing adultery with her, getting her pregnant, having her husband killed to cover it up, and most likely tainting her image in the eyes of the people—could tempt you to become hurt, bitter, and resentful? So it was with Ahithophel. Unchecked bitterness is able to rot even the most solid of loyalties and turn the hearts of even the wisest and most perceptive.

Offense can only gain power over us when we let it do so—but, when it does, its power is strong indeed. With its gradual but persistent nudges, it can even change the direction of those we might think untouchable and unmovable. Even Aaron and Miriam, so close to Moses and direct witnesses to God's working through their brother, were not immune. Taking offense at Moses' marriage to an Ethiopian woman—a marriage the historian Josephus suggests was a remnant of the prophet's life in Egypt—the pair cast aside their firsthand view of Moses' unique authority and spoke against him, declaring, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" (Numbers 12:1–2). In response, the Eternal thundered to them a reminder of His special relationship with Moses—how He worked with Moses in a way He did not work with anyone else—and asked, "Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" (v. 8). He then struck Miriam with leprosy, promising at Moses' request to restore her after she had spent a week outside the assembly (vv. 13–15).

Bitterness and resentment color our view of things—and, before we know it, they are all we know. God inspired Paul to warn us against letting angry feelings grow unchecked within us, admonishing us not to allow our anger to linger until it drags us into a sinful state of mind and gives place in our lives to the devil himself (Ephesians 4:26–27). "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice," he continues, telling us, instead, to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, *forgiving one another*, even as God in Christ forgave you" (vv. 31–32).

Feeling wrongfully hurt or attacked is a burden, but it is a burden Christ Himself knows well. Yet His response was not

to grow in bitterness and resentment—not to give the devil a place in His heart, to steer Him in directions He would not want to go—but rather, He, "when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). Knowing that God's judgment of Him was true was all He needed to bear the burdens of the wrongs He experienced, understanding that God would work them out in His own time and for the larger good They sought together.

The alternative is allowing a "root bearing bitterness" to begin growing deep in our heart—a root the Bible associates with one "whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God" (Deuteronomy 29:18) and with becoming spiritually defiled (Hebrews 12:15).

Bitter hearts do not seek the Kingdom. They long to settle grievances, to right wrongs done to them, and to settle scores. Those longings may seem humanly reasonable, but they pull their owners back toward Egypt, where such pursuits are allowed and even encouraged. We often hold on to bitterness and resentment out of a carnal hope to exact some sort of price from those who hurt us—but, in the end, we pay a much larger price ourselves.

Which Way Do We Want to Go?

Like Israel, we stand on the shores of our own Red Sea. God has made it possible for us to move forward, and He has shown us the incomparable land waiting for us at the end of the journey. We've tasted it, and the Days of Unleavened Bread encourage us to reflect on the goodness of it. Those days remind us that we must work with God to make our lives the vessels of better things and to ensure they increasingly reflect the characteristics of the world in which we wish to spend eternal life, not the death-stained world we've left behind.

Yet Egypt remains on the other side of our Red Sea, calling out to us—striving to pull us back into all we left. And the devil is patient. He gains great satisfaction whether we begin our journey back by merely dipping our toes into the water and then wading in a few steps at a time, or by diving with gusto to swim among the corpses. The spiritual pharaoh of that land of bondage cares not. Merely knowing that we have chosen his direction is enough for him.

But let us not give him that satisfaction. With our Egypt fully behind us, let us move forward, resisting and overcoming the forces that would draw us back. Our Savior and the Holy Spirit are there to give us all the help we could ever need, and if we will endure—continuing to place one foot in front of the other—we will soon find ourselves not only on the other side of the Red Sea, but on the other side of the Jordan River as well. (LN)

The Church Administration Department: An Interview with Mr. Rod McNair

By Editorial Staff

No matter how capable the agents in the field are, you always need Mission Control. To find out more about our very own Living Church of God “Mission Control,” we spoke to Mr. Rod McNair, Assistant Director of the Church Administration Department (CAD) at our Headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The Power of Example

We first asked Mr. McNair what originally moved him, as a second-generation Christian, to commit personally to God’s way of life in his youth. “I think one of the most important factors in my committing to what my parents believed was their example in really living what they believed and living what they taught,” he replied. “I felt like I didn’t see hypocrisy. I felt like they were the same people at home as they were at church with other people, and as they were while out and about in other situations. I think that really impressed upon me that they saw their religion as a way of life, and that helped me to come to the point where I saw it as a way of life as well. I think it would be hard, if you saw your parents acting differently in one situation than they acted in another situation—your conclusion, as a kid, would be, ‘You know, my parents don’t really believe this. And if they don’t, why should I?’”

The Importance of Central Coordination

Describing the department’s chief purpose, Mr. McNair also recalled when he began working in Church Administration. “I was a pastor out in Northern California, and Dr. Meredith asked me to come to Headquarters to work as an assistant in CAD and become involved in the Festival Office. So that’s how I became involved, and I think CAD’s most important function is working through the ministry and providing support and coordination. In supporting and coordinating ministers, CAD works through them to help take care of brethren all over the world. Our mission is really to aid the ministry, who are the ‘boots on the ground,’ so to speak. We give them the support they need to coordinate their efforts.”

Though CAD is located in Charlotte, its work profoundly affects every corner of God’s Church. “There are a number



of reasons why you need a central headquarters,” Mr. McNair said. “You need to coordinate efforts, coordinate the mission, coordinate the work of the many. We can’t do the pastoring. That’s not our job. But we can give support and coordination to the men who are

doing the pastoring. The field ministry and the central CAD need each other.”

The Meaning of Contribution

Although a department primarily devoted to “feeding the flock,” CAD also plays a key role in the Church’s continuing mission to preach the Gospel of God’s Kingdom. “*Tomorrow’s World* Presentations provide a glimpse into how CAD supports the preaching of the Gospel,” said Mr. McNair. “When people respond to the preaching of the Gospel, get in contact with a minister, and want to actually walk through the door and come to church, you find that *Tomorrow’s World* Presentations are a huge element in that response. When visitors meet people, when they talk to the local minister, when they have their ‘first contact,’ when they start to get to know others, then they realize, ‘Wow, there really are people who believe this and do it!’ Because I think a lot of people don’t really think that you *can* obey God in this world.”

That social aspect of preaching the Gospel is essential, and CAD makes sure the Church is well able to handle it. “CAD’s support to the local congregations and the local ministry really becomes a support to the preaching of the Gospel, because, as people walk in the door, if our congregations aren’t strong and ready for new people, and if our ministry isn’t coordinated and supported in a way that empowers them to work with new people, our efforts to serve those who respond to the preaching of the Gospel are going to fall flat,” Mr. McNair explained. “That’s a major way CAD contributes to the

Work. I think that's why TWPs have been so exciting for us—they make living God's way of life so tangible for people. Each one is a live event in a local area, put on by the local congregation, hosted by the local pastor. It's a real thrill to be a part of the process of planning and preparing those TWPs, because they enable CAD, the field ministry, and local congregations to have a very direct hand in preaching the Gospel."

Church Administration has certainly been busy in the TWP department! During 2019, the Church held 89 TWPs in the U.S. and 68 internationally. While the TWP program was temporarily suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic, God has heard our prayers and begun to open that door again, allowing us to revive TWPs in 2021!

Mr. McNair noted that in a world increasingly obsessed with frivolity, having that hand in preaching the Gospel blesses God's people with a deep sense of meaning. "Whether TWPs, the Festival Office in planning Feast sites, or operations of the Headquarters processes that we get involved with, I think what is the most exciting is to be a part of the mechanism that is helping to influence people all over the world in a positive way. A lot of people want to do something meaningful in this world.

Mr. McNair noted that in a world increasingly obsessed with frivolity, having that hand in preaching the Gospel blesses God's people with a deep sense of meaning. **"I think what is the most exciting is to be a part of the mechanism that is helping to influence people all over the world in a positive way."**

Especially over time, as they get older, that becomes more and more of a focus. And all of us in the Work are a part of something meaningful. I think that's the biggest thrill—when we can see our part in it, our small contribution to this mechanism that is changing people's lives."

The Benefits of Updated Technology

But, as we all know, some aspects of meaningful work don't always seem so meaningful while you're working on them. "We are part of the support system for the ministry and the congregations, and by necessity that involves administrative paperwork; it involves administrative processes," Mr. McNair said. "I think one of our biggest challenges is that it's easy to get bogged down in that paperwork, those administrative processes that are necessary. They clearly are just a tool to do the job, to do the Work, to be a part of that support and coordination, but it can be a frustration when the administrative

part seems to be taking more effort than the 'human' element, pulling you away from being able to see the big picture of what we're doing. That's the challenge. And I know Dr. Meredith talked about that, and quoted Mr. Armstrong years ago. He would say to the men around, *Fellows, we must never let administration of the Work get in the way of our personal relationship with God and the spiritual elements of why we're here.*"

Today's modern technology has made some of those administrative processes less tedious to manage—both for the Church's employees and for its members across the globe. "We've benefited from the work of those in the Information Technology and Internet Department," Mr. McNair said gratefully. "There are changes that they have made and implemented to make the system more efficient. Our system isn't perfect, to be sure, but it's come a long way. And there still are ways that they are currently working on it, though the COVID-19 crisis sidetracked a number of our projects. But it's been neat to see the improvement—the Feast registration process, for example, now works more smoothly. As each year has gone by, we've kept trying to make it as painless as possible. It's not perfect yet, but it seems to be improving. The goal is always

to make it a little more seamless, a little less confusing, and a little more informational for brethren, so the improvement in that area has been good to see."

And further improvements are on the horizon for CAD. "One project we are working on, which I think will be a big help in improving our ongoing communication with the ministry and even in training new ministers, is converting the *Pastoral Manual* into something that is online instead of a paper book," Mr. McNair said. "One of the neat things about that change is that the online manual will be a much more efficient way to categorize policies and procedures—we'll be able to index them, and ministers will be able to look them up and search for them. That's one area where we have not been as efficient in the past—in collecting and collating policies, procedures, and communication in a way that is easy to organize. So, as we can do this online, we want to digitize both the *Pastoral Manual* and the *Ministerial Bulletin*, which is a newsletter that we put out periodically for the ministry with updates, news, continuing education, and policies. Organizing them online, so that all of those things can be found, grouped, and collated—that's really going to be exciting. I think that can become a much more efficient and effective tool for the ministry to use."

The *Living Church News* is grateful for Mr. McNair's willingness to spend some time with us. Certainly, we can all pray that our Father continues to bless the Church Administration Department's efforts to provide guidance, teaching, and training to the ministry and brethren all over the world! (LW)

A Trip Through Time and a Need for Speed

By **Juliette McNair**

The following article is adapted from two of the Student Life essays available at LCGEducation.org, in which Juliette McNair, a student at Living Education–Charlotte who also works in the Editorial Department, provides insight into aspects of the LE experience.

Living Education–Charlotte students enjoy many exciting extracurricular opportunities over the course of the nine-month program. We hope you'll enjoy reading about two!

—Editorial Staff



The Waldensian Trail of Faith

At 9:00 a.m. on Monday, November 16, twelve Living Education students stood in a dorm driveway waiting for Miss Rebekah Ross and Mr. Jonathan McNair—their “taxi-drivers” for a trip 800 years into the past.

A few hours later, they pulled into the Cottian Alps in the border region of France and Italy—actually, they arrived at the Waldensian Trail of Faith located in Valdeese, North Carolina. And, for half a day, they journeyed into the Era of Thyatira (Revelation 2:18–29).

At this outdoor museum, students stepped into an exact replica of the old “Barba” college where young Waldensians memorized long sections of Scripture in secret. Several intrepid LE students crawled on hands and knees into a model of the cave where dozens of Waldensians once covertly congregated to study and sing hymns. Only a sliver of light illuminated the back of the cave. The guide explained that on one terrible day, French-Catholic soldiers used that tiny crack in the rock to smoke the gatherers out—in order to kill them, one by one, as they crawled from the cave.

Mr. McNair explained to the group that much of the history exhibited was *not* the history of true Christians. Early on, most of the Waldenses were absorbed into Protestantism, and the true Church moved into Eastern Europe. Driving this point home, the students passed a replica of the Chanforan Monument, dedicated to the Waldensians’ official entry into the Reformation in 1532.

Mr. McNair encouraged the students to appreciate the sacrifices of these people, even while recognizing that their beliefs were not fully scriptural. He challenged them, “Would you be willing to die for what you believe in, as they did?”

After the drive back to Charlotte, students jumped out of the cars and back into their modern lives at Living Education. For just a day, they had visited the Era of Thyatira and stepped into the shoes of the Waldensians—and, just as God’s Church has carried on through time, so do they.

The NASCAR Hall of Fame

If you have a need for speed, you may wish you had tagged along with the Living Education students on Sunday, December 20. The NASCAR Hall of Fame is located in downtown Charlotte, only 20 minutes from the student residences—so they didn’t have to *race* to get there by 10:00 a.m. Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan McNair accompanied the students, along with several other LE instructors and their wives, providing some stiff competition for the races later in the day.

Making their way through the Hall, students walked the “Glory Road” exhibit and examined 18 cars dating from the 1920s to the 1990s. These iconic stock cars were parked on a display track with banking gradually increasing to 33 degrees. Speedways use steep banking to apply centripetal force to the cars, which prevents them from being flung off the tracks due to the lack of friction between the tires and the road.

At the Pit Crew Challenge, students and teachers teamed up and competed against each other to get cars jacked up, gassed up, and equipped with new tires. The pit crew of Mr. Ryan Dawson, who teaches LE’s “Living the Fruits of the Spirit” class, took first place by finishing in less than nine seconds.

Finally, Mr. McNair led the group to the Racing Simulators. Students and instructors jumped into the driver seats of stock cars lined up beneath a huge video screen that projected the virtual race. The virtual track for the day was the oval Daytona International Speedway. The fastest lap-times and speeds were projected onto the leaderboard, and DaQuan Rucker snared first place at 193.79 mph, edging past German Roldan’s previous record of 192.64. Mr. Jerry Ruddlesden and Mr. McNair followed close behind.

As the group climbed into the vans and were driven—at normal speed—back to the dorms, they geared up for the final stretch of the semester. Finals loomed and term project deadlines were fast approaching. Soon, unless the students shifted into high gear, they would find themselves with a *need for speed*. ^{LN}



Enduring Our Trial Together

Adapted by **Editorial Staff**

Editor's Note: *The following perspectives on life during the pandemic, published recently by our Regional Office in the UK, are from brethren in Africa and Europe. Some have contracted the coronavirus themselves, while others have been impacted by the wider effects of lockdowns and other measures taken by governments in their areas. COVID-19 restrictions have varied widely, and the impact has differed dramatically depending on where one lives. Mr. Peter Nathan's comment about "the anomalies that no one has an answer to" is a sobering testimony! We hope you find not only encouragement, but also a deepened sense of connection with our brethren around the world through these shared experiences.*

Peter Nathan, Regional Director for Europe and Africa:

"Part of the problem in [so many] areas are the anomalies that no one has an answer to. For instance, on Wednesday afternoon, January 20, I was driven through Kibera, the largest slum in Africa, home to some 800,000–1,000,000 people living on top of one another, located in Nairobi, Kenya. In the 25 minutes or so that I spent on the main street at rush hour, I saw fewer than ten people wearing masks, and most weren't worn correctly. To our minds, such an environment would be a rampant festering place for COVID-19, but [that] is not the case. The same situation persists in South Africa's shanty towns. Yet, elsewhere, COVID-19 is exacting its toll on human life without question."

Charina Baterzal, Oslo, Norway: "The year 2020 has been an interesting and challenging year for me, especially being a newly baptized member. During these lockdowns, I was able to meet more brethren and even gain friends through online Sabbath services and virtual social meetings organized by the Church. I also discovered a new passion for hiking, camping in the wild, and spending more time with nature, and appreciated God's beautiful works more. Trials and challenges were also present, from the sudden death of my eldest sister [to] the admission to the hospital of my mother in the Philippines. I learned how to let go of my fears and worries, to trust, and to 'let God.' I felt all the love and

support of everyone through prayers and messages in these difficult times. I am never alone."

Barry and Carolyn Laggar, Cape Town, South Africa:

"Although we had heard of lockdowns occurring in China and Europe, it was still a surprise when South Africa was cast into a very hard lockdown in late March. We awoke on 27 March unable to leave our homes, except to shop for essentials. Even a walk around the block was prohibited. Online schooling and working from home became the new reality for many families. Although challenging at times, our children were always eager to log in to see their teachers and friends, which made the transition a lot easier. Knowing that all their friends were in the same situation made it a lot more fun. Throughout lockdown we kept in touch with a number of brethren and developed a deeper bond with some we had previously not known well. Everyone's experience was different, from families losing their income to widows being on their own—even, in one case, losing a family member to COVID-19.

"Cape Town Sabbath services were conducted through webcast, with sermonettes pre-recorded and prayers done via Skype. We feel privileged to be part of a congregation that rallied around to help each other through a difficult experience, but even more privileged to be part of God's firstfruits as we see prophetic events unfolding. Although lockdown was a very unpleasant experience for many, it has given us time to reflect and brought us closer together as a family—and, more importantly, closer to God."

Hugh Stewart, Minister for London and Sevenoaks, England:

"As a shepherd of God's flock and minister of the Gospel, I, like everyone else, have had to make adjustments in the wake of the pandemic. Some of these adjustments created new ways to minister to the flock and preach the Gospel, but also added new limitations. The new ways involved a greater reliance on technology instead of the 'old-fashioned' way of personal contact. One immediate positive is that I can do more counselling—baptismal, Bible Studies, answering questions, etc.—in one week. In the past, driving to in-person meetings consumed my time. Another

positive was flexibility to reschedule personal online meetings. As someone who is technologically challenged, another positive was that I was forced to engage the dreaded world of technology. I estimate that by 2025 I will have mastered Zoom and all things technological!

“The new limitations are not being able to meet in person, one-on-one or collectively, on the Sabbath and Holy Days. One adjustment I made was with the messages I prepared. Instead of messages more pertinent to the local congregation, I prepared messages for a wider audience, including new people who may not understand some of the basic doctrines of the Church.”

Cyril Morris, Sevenoaks, England: “This is my experience of COVID-19: It all started in March just after lockdown, with a cough every few minutes which increased rapidly as the days went by. At times I struggled to speak due to the constant coughing, which seemed to progress as the nights drew near, [along with] a hoarseness. I experienced severe headaches... pain in my ribcage, diarrhea, and [a] prickling sensation on my skin. After two weeks I lost my sense of taste and smell. I felt weak with no energy. In all this I never gave up on my faith. My wife and I were constant in prayer. I knew the Lord

“We feel privileged to be part of a congregation that rallied around to help each other through a difficult experience, but even more privileged to be part of God’s firstfruits as we see prophetic events unfolding.”

was with me—and still is. My pastor, the saints, [and various] families and friends were also praying for me. My prayers go out to all those who have lost loved ones. As for me, I continue to give God thanks for healing me and taking me through those difficult weeks.”

Agnes Acheampong, London, England: “It started with what I thought was a mild cold—sniffles here and there, a sore throat, and a cough every now and then. So, as instructed, I took time off work and returned a couple of weeks later feeling better. Then it returned, but this time felt different [from] any cold or flu I have had before. Again, sniffles and a sore throat, though what really struck me was the migraine—even opening my eyes was painful because any glimpse of light would feel as though someone was pressing against my temples. This continued all through the weekend and for months afterwards. A few days after experiencing this, I noticed I could not taste or smell anything!

Days after testing positive, my symptoms worsened and the days felt longer and longer. The migraines strengthened in intensity and resulted in me constantly feeling nauseous and vomiting. I had a fever that I could not shake, and my breathing became so erratic that I could only sleep with pillows propped behind my back. ‘Little’ things we take for granted daily, such as being able to go for walks and breathing fresh air, seemed like a luxury.

“As I reflected in bed, I realised God was using this to draw me nearer to Him. It was God’s prerogative to heal me, but I needed to do my part, remain faithful, and pray that He would. It was then that I found relief and truly began to see God working to heal me. Although [at the time of writing] I do not have 100 percent of my sense of taste and smell back, I am extremely grateful for God’s healing and intervention, which allowed me to be able to return to work and resume my daily activities. Thank you to everyone who remembered me in their prayers—He truly is an amazing God!”

Nicolas Nosel, Deacon for Strasbourg, France (Translated from French): “From 21 March to 15 May, I experienced 56 days of hospitalisation with COVID-19. My symptoms started gradually with a cough, fever, and headache.

My situation did not improve, so I asked for an anointed cloth. My doctor told me I had chronic bronchitis and he prescribed medication, but my health still did not improve [and soon] deteriorated.... As COVID-19 was already spreading in the East of France, the doctor came to see me right away. When she measured the level of oxygen in the blood, it was around 88 percent (normal is between 90–100 percent). I had to be hospitalised immediately.... the hospital’s emergency room was

already very full. I remember entering through the door of the hospital, but after that, nothing.

“I spent more than two weeks in an artificial coma... which was followed by a few weeks of reanimation and five weeks of functional rehabilitation. After all this time in a coma [and experiencing] immobilisation, intubation, manipulation... my body had become very weak and bruised. For five weeks I had to repair all this, with the help of doctors, nurses, [and] physio and speech therapists, to whom I pay tribute for their work. At the rehabilitation centre, the government wanted to know the behaviour of caregivers and patients. We had a visit from the TV5 and FR3 Alsace [journalists], who interviewed me. I said to them, ‘Our President E. Macron said we are at war with an invisible and powerful enemy, but our Heavenly Father is all-powerful.’ On 21 March, I entered the hospital lying down, and on 15 May, I walked out. I give glory to the Eternal Father for putting me back on my feet, healed from COVID-19.” (LN)

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STAY ON THE ROAD! continued from page 2

that “the church of the living God” is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Are we that Church or not? Further, God has placed His ministry within the Church to keep us unified and on track “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4:13–15).

I am not writing these comments for those who may no longer be with us, but for loyal and faithful members of the Living Church of God. Dear brethren, some of us have lived a bit longer than others. Our Council of Elders is mostly made up of men who have been around for a while, both in this life and in the Church. We have seen many conspiracies come and go. We have seen individuals become distracted, going down a rabbit hole of *seemingly* consistent and credible carnal ideas that appeal to

them—and, sadly, as they keep going, becoming more and more convinced that what they are reading is the truth.

Satan uses the Internet and social media to grease that hole—and it becomes nearly impossible to extricate someone from these powerful deceptions, once they are bought into. No matter how many wise men and women try to help them, deluded people become convinced they are right as they turn themselves into poster children for this proverb: “A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment. A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart” (Proverbs 18:1–2).

During this Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread season, let us examine ourselves and see where we stand. Let us stop heeding the Internet, get back to heeding the Bible, and look to where Christ is leading. There is a reason God gave us these Festivals and commands us to come out of Egyptian slavery. Do not follow the example of faithless, self-willed Israel.

Gerald E. Weston



Behind the March 2021 Cover: The Rise of the New Gods

Pictured here is the *Tomorrow's World* magazine's March 2021 cover, and one can immediately see that it is sure to turn some heads. It strikingly depicts a pagan idol with its head obscured by a taped image of the LGBT+ “pride” flag, that flag itself overlaid with what is commonly perceived as the “evolutionary chain” from ape to human being.

“We all loved the cover as soon as we saw it,” said Mr. Gerald Weston in a brief interview. “It was very compelling. We initially wondered if it was going to be the wise thing, because anything that’s negative toward the LGBTQ community is seen with a great deal of animosity. Every time we do something where we mention sin and show the ‘pride’ flag, we get some sort of blowback—and the magazine is often shown on the telecast, and certainly on the website.

“But, ultimately, we don’t want to be so careful that we fail to speak out against these sins in our society,” Mr. Weston concluded. “We want to push the barrier as much as we can, without being thrown off all television. We simply cannot be silent.”

Mr. Wallace Smith’s bold and thought-provoking article “New Gods, New Sins” pulls no punches as it calls out some of this world’s most pervasive and popular idols of the heart, including macroevolution, climate change, sexual anarchy, and satanic social transformation. As the cover suggests, and as Mr. Smith’s article states without reservation, these new obsessions are strikingly similar to the false religions of antiquity—and every bit as deceptive and harmful.

This cover also highlights Mr. Richard Ames’ powerful article “Seven Laws of Success,” in which he expertly summarizes several life-changing principles championed by Mr. Herbert Armstrong, as well as Mr. Rod McNair’s inspiring “Will You Do Hard Things?,” which delves into God’s command to choose the *right* path over the *easy* one.

—Editorial Staff

Under the Shadow of His Wings

Our lives are often beset with upsets and troubles. Yet, so many times, we do not choose to look at what is soothing and uplifting. As the Apostle Paul wrote, we have a choice as to where we center our attention (Philippians 4:8).

Though many mistakenly believe that they can or should “go it alone” in life, we fare far better when we have help. Are you feeling alone—perhaps vulnerable? That doesn’t need to be the case. The Apostle Paul also stated that God would never abandon His people—those who sought to follow His ways (Hebrews 13:5).

Those who heard Jesus Christ preach lived under the harsh rule of the ancient Roman Empire. At times, their lives seemed monotonous, without the expectation that things might get better. Jesus reassured them:

... I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 6:25–26).

God takes care of anyone who surrenders to His will. God will provide for their needs and preserve them so much more than He has done for mere birds. He *will* take care of us as we face upsets and troubles.

Where do birds go when storms come? Birds are distinctly adaptable to foul weather. They are small enough to find shelter from rain, snow, and wind in tree hollows, in thickets near the ground, and among many man-made structures. They store up additional fat just before the arrival of bad weather, and their legs and feet do not lose heat due to heat transfers in their unique lower circulatory system.

God has also made birds able to avoid oncoming natural disasters:

A flock of birds flew away from its nesting site days before there were any signs of danger and well before forecasters predicted the arrival of a massive storm system that spawned 84 confirmed tornadoes.... by the time [meteorologists] were sure it was coming, the birds had already figured it out and were gone (*NBCNews.com*, December 18, 2014).

He has indeed equipped the birds of the air so that their needs are taken care of!

The Creator warns us in advance as to what we can expect to see in the years just ahead. He makes provision for those who are His, and we can’t afford to be without His guidance and protection as current downward trends in this age continue. “Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep; O LORD, You preserve man and beast. How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings” (Psalm 36:6–7).

If God takes care of birds, will He not also take care of us?

—Brian Pomicter