

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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Bring Every Thought into the Obedience of Christ

Dear Brethren,

The Feast of Pentecost reminds us of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the fledgling first-century Church (Acts 2). But is there a special lesson regarding this day for those of us living at the end of the age? I suggest that there is.

We learn that the children of Israel entered into the so-called Old Covenant at Mount Sinai on Pentecost. It was at this time that God thundered the Ten Commandments to the Israelites (Exodus 20:1-17), but this was not the origin of these commandments. (See the sermon “Were the Ten Commandments in Force Before Moses?” available at LCG.org.)

The Israelites were eager to receive God’s blessings and apparently considered it easy to meet His conditions, but they lacked the heart and faith to obey God in the face of trials and temptations (Deuteronomy 5:29; Hebrews 3:17-19). This is why there is a need for the New Covenant in which God writes His laws *on our hearts* and *in our minds* by the power of His Holy Spirit (Hebrews 8:10).

We may presume that we are above the errors of those who stood at the base of Mount Sinai. After all, did we not receive a different heart when we had hands laid upon us following baptism? Why, then, do so many fall away? Any of us who have been in the Church for a decade or more know of people, likely even close friends, who have chosen to go in a different direction, some abandoning the truth altogether. So, does the coming of the Holy Spirit completely and instantly solve the problem of the human heart? It would appear not—but why not?

The Spirit of This Age

The Bible speaks of four spirits: the spirit of animals, the spirit in man, the Holy Spirit, and “the spirit who now works in the

sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). The spirit in man empowers the human brain to think on a level far superior to all other physical living creatures (1 Corinthians 2:11). Consider how mankind has been able to send a rocket to Mars—as it travels around the sun at 53,853 miles per hour—and land sophisticated instruments on its surface! Incredible! But for all our brilliance, no matter where we look, humanity is marked by conflict of every sort.

The spirit in man is incomplete apart from the Spirit of God. Sadly, we too often rely on human reason alone. How often we say, *This is how I look at it*, or *This is what I think*, not realizing how much the prince of the power of the air influences our thinking. Mr. Herbert Armstrong rightly explained that Satan works through moods and feelings, stirring up attitudes of pride, vanity, and hurt. To any who have eyes to see, it should be obvious that he is working especially hard right now to stir up anger and an attitude of taking matters into our own hands—otherwise known as rebellion. Dr. Meredith explained in his booklet *The Ten Commandments*:

A revealing insight into modern man’s reaction to the phrase in the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,” was given by an Ohio minister, David Redding, who said, “We do not mean it. We don’t like authority, nor will we give in easily even if He is the King of heaven.... It is all too obvious that most men over most of the years have prayed earnestly: ‘Thy kingdom *not* come, *my* will be done’” (p. 69).

Yes, the attitude of *my will be done* is alive and well, even in the Church of God. This was seen over the last year with

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the “mask controversy.” How remarkable that people would leave over an issue so small. While some tried to make it out to be a moral issue, the truth is that too many got caught up in the spirit of this age. *I have my rights—nobody is going to tell me what to do!* A few members would respect the requirements of Walmart but balk at a Church judgment. Think about it, brethren! Can we not see who is stirring up strife and contention, even among us? How many of us would have survived the 40 years from Sinai to the Promised Land?

Is Jesus Christ the Head of His Church or not? (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22). Just as one can pray “*Thy kingdom come*” and really mean “*my will be done,*” so can one repeat that “Jesus is the Head of the Church” while really meaning, “as long as He agrees with me!” Of course, the problem comes in because God works through imperfect human instruments—whom some accept as “Christ’s servants” only so long as they agree with them.

Do Not Be Turned Aside

Dear brethren, I confess that I feel very inadequate to be correcting you. I know my own weaknesses and shortcomings, but I also know that I did not politick my way into the office of an evangelist, much less the Presiding Evangelist of the Living Church of God. I also know that this office puts the burden of leadership upon me, and that God will hold me responsible for how I carry that burden.

So, even though I am certainly not of the same stature as Mr. Herbert Armstrong, if I believe that this is the true Church of God and that Jesus is the Head of this Church, I must do as Paul instructed Timothy in his second letter to the young evangelist: “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:2–4).

“Sound doctrine” does not involve whether or not to wear masks; rather, sound doctrine most definitely involves how

Christ rules His Church, and the context of the above passage cries out against a “do-your-own-thing” attitude. Paul instructed another young minister, “Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you” (Titus 2:15). Look carefully at the verses preceding this instruction. Titus was to address issues that were sticky then and remain so today: relations between men and women and between employees and employers.

If there is ever a lesson we should learn from the 40-year Exodus, it regards the consequences of “every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes” (Deuteronomy 12:8). Brethren, are we so blind that we cannot see how the prince of the air is stirring up the same attitude of rebellion at the end of this age? He constantly broadcasts anger and the attitude of *Who does he think he is? I have my rights! No one is going to tell me what to do.*

No one can stop you from choosing your own way. But be warned that if you remain caught up in this world, you will perish with it! We are in a war—a war that takes place in the heart and mind.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3–5).

Brethren, please do not be naïve. There is another spirit seeking to destroy us. Recognize it! And remember the humble spirit through which God works in us (Isaiah 66:1–2). Recognize the difference between the Spirit of God and the spirit of this world. Recognize our inability to direct our own ways apart from God (Jeremiah 10:23–24). And bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ!



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A Lesson in Counting

Determining the correct date of Pentecost has historically created controversy in the Church of God. It did so for decades in what was known as the Radio Church of God, which later became the Worldwide Church of God, and it continues to be controversial to some even to this day.

God used Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong to restore observance of the biblical Festivals and Holy Days, which he and his wife Loma kept by themselves for seven years before others joined with them. It is important to note that he obeyed first—understanding the profound meaning of these days came later as he studied into and observed them.

Unlike Pentecost, the other Holy Days are on specific dates—for example, the Feast of Trumpets is on the first day of Tishri, the seventh month, and the First Day of Unleavened Bread is on the fifteenth of the month of Abib. Pentecost, however, must be counted from a set time that is *not* the same calendar *date* every year: “And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath” (Leviticus 23:15–16).

On the surface, that sounds simple enough—so what is controversial about it?

Two Crucial Questions

The first question we must answer to arrive at the correct day is, *What does it mean by “from the day after the Sabbath”?* The second is, *Which Sabbath?*

The key word in verse 15’s phrase is *from*. How are we to understand this word? Let us say that you want to go fishing a week (seven days) from Sunday. What day would that be? Most would agree that a week from Sunday is the following Sunday, but how do we arrive at that day? Do you begin counting *with* Sunday or does *from* mean the first of the seven days is Monday? Count it for yourself: You arrive at the following Sunday when “day one” is Monday.

In standard English usage, to *count from* is not the same as to *count beginning with*. So, Mr. Armstrong began counting *from*, not *beginning with*, the day after the Sabbath. The day after the Sabbath is Sunday, and if you count *from* Sunday, the first day in the count-

down to Pentecost is Monday. Forty-nine days (seven weeks) would bring you to a Sunday, and the fiftieth day would then always fall on a Monday—and that is how the Church kept Pentecost for four decades. Some of us old-timers still remember that.

Through those decades, a few approached Mr. Armstrong and accused him of being wrong. Mostly, according to the limited knowledge I have on that period of the Church’s history, they tried to convince him that *from* meant *beginning with*. I’m certain that they had other explanations as well, but their *attitudes* had a lot to do with why their ideas were rejected. Then, in 1974, as I recall, it was Mr. Raymond McNair who came to Mr. Armstrong in a humble spirit and explained to him where he was wrong. The difference in attitude reminds me of the contrast between the first two of the king of Israel’s captains in 2 Kings 1:9–15, who tried to take the prophet Elijah into custody in a disrespectful and pe-remptory way, and the third one, who came in humility. The difference in outcome was remarkable.

Mr. Armstrong was indeed correct that common English usage indicates counting *away from*, not *beginning with*, but he was shown that this is not so in the original Hebrew usage. It was at that time that he contacted Hebrew scholars, including an associate in Israel, who confirmed that the original Hebrew expression should be understood as *count beginning with the day after the Sabbath*. That year, we began observing Pentecost on a Sunday rather than a Monday, and we have been doing so ever since.

Why Not Sivan 6?

It is predominant among Jews to observe the Feast of Weeks, the day that we refer to as Pentecost, on a set calendar day—Sivan 6—no matter which day of the week it falls upon. Why do we not follow their example?

As we read earlier, the key passage of Scripture that explains when Pentecost should be kept is Leviticus 23:15–16: “And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath....” This is ambiguous, to say the least. Which Sabbath? It is not defined here. What about the day of the wave sheaf offering? Do the Scriptures clarify that?

“When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it” (Leviticus 23:10–11). This, too, is ambiguous. We are left asking, *Which Sabbath?*

What all seem to agree upon is that the Sabbath is related to the time of Unleavened Bread. That leaves us with five options: the Sabbath right before the Days of Unleavened Bread, the First Day, the Last Day, the Sabbath that falls within the Days, or the Sabbath immediately after the Days.

Jews have chosen the Sabbath of the First Day of Unleavened Bread—and, since this is always the fifteenth of Abib (or Nisan), they believe that every year the Feast of Weeks will be on Sivan 6. They counted once for all time. One could certainly reason that this satisfied the need to count, but why then did God not simply say that the Feast of Weeks was on Sivan 6—the sixth day of the third month?

Should we follow common Jewish custom? If not, why not? Although Leviticus 23 appears ambiguous and open to interpretation, it contains a clue that will settle this and other important questions. The key to unlocking the mystery is found in the words “When you come into the land which I give to you” (v. 10). Yes, it points us to a specific time to look for the answer.

Israel wandered about in the desert for 40 years. During that time, almost the entire older generation died off—including Miriam, Aaron, and Moses. It would be Joshua who would lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land. We read of this in the book named after him. Joshua 1 reminds us of the commission given to Joshua and how he assumed command after the death of Moses. We read in Joshua 2 of the spies he sent out, and how they were hidden and protected by Rahab before sneaking back across the river to report on what they had learned. The third and fourth chapters then describe Israel crossing the Jordan and stepping into the Promised Land for the first time. The timing of all this is important to our understanding.

We read that they crossed the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month (4:19). Joshua 5 is crucial. It not only tells us that the men were circumcised, but also contains two particularly important verses related to our understanding of when Pentecost falls. However, before looking at them, let us be reminded of an important instruction given in Leviticus 23: “You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings” (Leviticus 23:14).

Remember that this instruction was especially relevant to when they came into the Promised Land. “When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the

priest” (v. 10). This practice was to continue year after year, but it is evident that it was to be done from the time they entered the land. Let us summarize what is clearly known from what we have already read:

- A wave sheaf of the firstfruits was to be offered on the day after a Sabbath.
- This was to be done when they came into the Promised Land.
- They could not eat of the produce of the land until the wave sheaf was offered.

With this in mind, let us now address two verses in the fifth chapter of Joshua:

Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day (Joshua 5:10–11).

The passage goes on to show that the manna ceased the next day (v. 12), but verses 10–11 are the most pertinent because they confirm which Sabbath preceded the wave sheaf offering. Verse 10 tells us what we learn elsewhere in Scripture—that the Passover is at the beginning (twilight) of the fourteenth day of the first month. Then, verse 11 says that they ate of the produce of the land “on the day after the Passover.” From this we can conclude the following:

- Passover is the fourteenth and the day after the Passover is the fifteenth.
- The fifteenth is an annual Sabbath, a Feast day (Leviticus 23:6–7).

Israel ate of “parched” grain (new grain) on the day after Passover—the fifteenth.

- Israel was not to eat of the produce of the land until the wave sheaf was offered.
- This means that the wave sheaf was offered on the fifteenth that year.
- Therefore, since the wave sheaf must follow, not necessarily fall on, a Sabbath, the fifteenth could not be the Sabbath from which to begin our calculations for Pentecost.

We must conclude, then, that the Sabbath that precedes the wave sheaf offering and our count toward Pentecost must be the *weekly* Sabbath.

And There Is More!

Members often say that we count Pentecost beginning with the day after the weekly Sabbath that falls during the Days of Unleavened Bread. However, this is only partially correct and can lead to an error. Every several years, Passover falls on a weekly Sabbath, as was the case in 2021—so the Days of Unleavened Bread begin on Sunday and end with the following weekly Sabbath. If the wave sheaf were always offered after the weekly Sabbath that falls during the seven days of the Festival, in years such as this one the wave sheaf would fall *outside of* the Days of Unleavened Bread. This might appear on the surface to be a possibility, but Joshua 5 again comes to our rescue.

Remember that, in Joshua 5, the children of Israel ate of the produce of the land on the day after Passover (v. 11). We have already shown that they could not eat this produce until after the wave sheaf offering, and that the wave sheaf offering had to occur on the day after the *weekly* Sabbath. Therefore, Joshua 5:11 tells us when the wave sheaf is offered in a circumstance where Passover falls on the weekly Sabbath. In years such as this one, the wave sheaf is to be offered on the Sunday that is the First Holy Day of Unleavened Bread. So, it is the wave sheaf offering, *not* the weekly Sabbath, that must fall within the Days of Unleavened Bread! That is why we will keep Pentecost on May 16, 2021, rather than a week later.

There are those who try to get around these plain facts in order to promote their own ideas, but a careful reading of these verses brings us to these inescapable conclusions. God did not leave us in the dark as to when the wave sheaf was to be offered, which Sabbath He meant, and what to do when the Passover falls on the weekly Sabbath. And there is one more lesson we can draw from the controversies that have surrounded Pentecost.

A Lesson in Judgments

God used Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong to teach His people near the end of this age the need to keep the annual Festivals and Holy Days spelled out clearly in the Bible. Yet, for four decades, Mr. Armstrong's count was off by a day. What are we to make of this?

There were individuals during those 40 years who saw that Mr. Armstrong was in error. Some saw the big picture—that it was not up to each individual to determine for himself the Church's practice in this controversial matter—but some left the Church over this or sought to cause division. Jesus tells us to judge leaders by their fruits (Matthew 7:16–20). When we look back on the Work that God accomplished through Mr. Armstrong, we see God blessing it immensely, even during those 40 years. On the other hand, what became of those who left over what was a sincere error in Mr. Armstrong's understanding? Where are they now? What were

the fruits of their labors? Did they preach the Gospel to the world? Did they warn the world of what is coming? I think we know the answer: Nothing became of any of them.

God used Mr. Armstrong to show us the need to keep the annual Festivals and Holy Days as they are explained in the Bible. God also used him to explain the clear meaning of these days—God's plan of salvation for mankind. If God had not used him, or someone else, to explain these things, none of those who contended against Mr. Armstrong would even have been keeping these days at all!

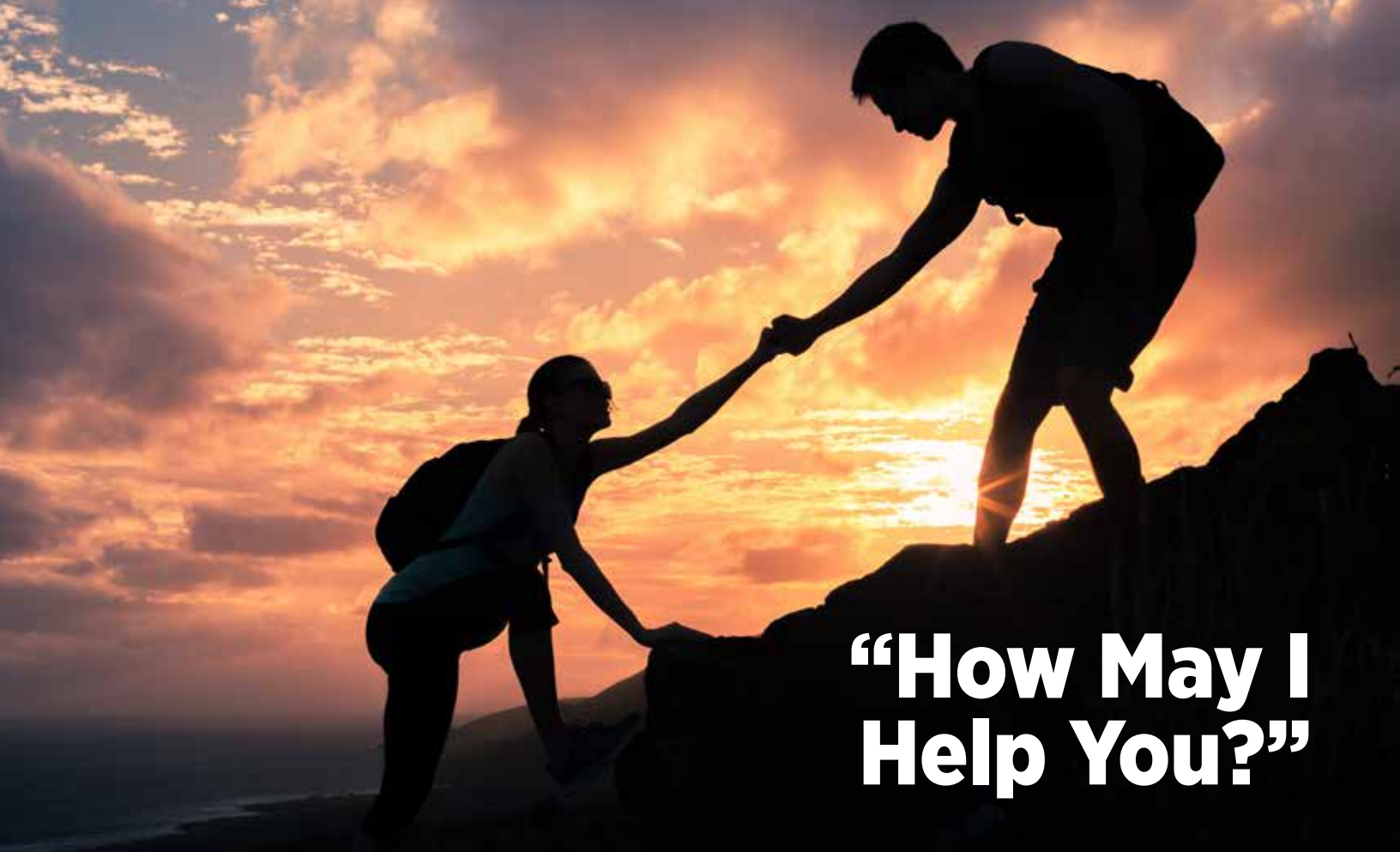
Where Mr. Armstrong was in error was that he did not understand the difference in English and Hebrew usage when using the word *from*, and, as a result, he made a wrong judgment. The error was not *whether* to keep Pentecost, but *when*. And once he understood his error, he did not put it to a vote—he made a judgment for the whole Church that thenceforth we would observe Pentecost on Sunday. It is clear—from history and from the fruits of Mr. Armstrong's labor compared to that of those who opposed him—that God backed His chosen servant even while he was making this sincere mistake!

There are personal decisions each of us need to make every day. Some of those decisions have to do with how and when we worship God. Do we study the Bible by reading it in chronological order, by subject matter with a concordance, or a combination of the two? Do we pray in the morning, in the evening, or three times a day? These are judgments we must make in our own lives, and there are many others. Paul instructs us to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

But there are judgments that must be made by *the Church* when it comes to collective worship. We read, “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). Perhaps in this God provided an example to those for whom this matter would be controversial in the future. We see that individuals were not left to themselves to decide when and where to observe the day, for Pentecost had “fully come” and “they were all with one accord in one place.”

Observing Pentecost on the wrong day for four decades is not the only mistake the Church has made—it is merely one of the more pronounced errors. It was an unusual situation that arose as God was revealing to His end-time Church so many truths that had been lost. One could, of course, read into this far more than is intended; there are lessons in it for us, but we must be careful not to justify deliberate error, personal agenda, or tampering with the Scriptures, as was done after Mr. Armstrong's death.

Rather, let us rejoice that God has given us the key that unlocks *when* to observe the Day of Pentecost—a day so meaningful to those He is calling during this age! (L)



“How May I Help You?”

By **Richard F. Ames**

Years ago, I was in a department store where I saw that one of the clerks had a badge on her lapel: “HMIHY?” It was supposed to remind her to ask the question, “How may I help you?” in order to represent the kind of service the store wanted its customers to receive. When you interact with a business, you sometimes need to contact their “Customer Service” department; often, the first question they ask is “How may I help you?” And no matter what the product or service may be, we often form our strongest impression of a company by how well—or, sadly, sometimes, how poorly—they perform customer service.

Jesus Christ, though He was the Word of God in the flesh and the very Creator of the universe, set the example of service. He even said that “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Do you and I have an attitude of service toward others? We should internalize that attitude, if we haven’t already.

God has given each of us spiritual gifts. We all have different gifts, and we all serve in different ways. Many of us serve in various capacities on the Sabbath. Some set up the chairs. Others take care of the audio system. Others serve as ushers, or assist in a mothers’ room, or help with parking.

Some provide special music. There is a lot more going on each Sabbath than just a sermonette and a sermon, and we all help in different ways *as we are able*. Some of us have opportunities to visit brethren who are sick, at home, or lonely in the hospital.

Sometimes we help by offering encouragement or a sympathetic ear to our brethren at services—being there for one another, expressing our love and support. During the recent pandemic, we have learned the lesson of just what a blessing it is to be able to physically meet together for fellowship. There have been various times throughout Church history when meeting together for fellowship was a real challenge; maybe now we have a little taste of what some earlier brethren experienced in times of trial.

Of course, we often help one another when we *aren’t* at Sabbath services, as well. Parents make a happy and comfortable home for their children, and children do their part to help their parents with chores around the house. Some of you may have the gift of being caregivers. I remember how my sister served my mother as a caregiver for nearly ten years. It takes great strength to rise to the challenge and experience the blessings of serving in that very special way.

A Serving Nature?

We in God’s Church know that God has called us to overcome human nature. We, who are preparing to become His first-

fruits and serve under Jesus Christ in the coming Kingdom of God, are learning to be lights even to today's world. How are we learning? We meditate on God's law and His whole way of life, and we practice that way as we obey His commandments, radiate His love to others, forgive those who have wronged or hurt us, and cooperate with His government here on the earth—the Church. We want to develop God's own divine nature within ourselves.

One major characteristic of that nature is an attitude of *service*. Who is the greatest Servant in the universe? God the Father is the greatest Servant in the universe—even Jesus said, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). What's more, God has called all of *us* to be like Him and to be like Christ. He has called us to *serve*. So, we need to develop the heart and the attitude of a servant. Notice the difference between Christ's attitude and that of the mother of two apostles:

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She said to Him, “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.” But Jesus answered and said, “You do not know what you ask” (Matthew 20:20–22).

Yes, they had ambition, and we need to set goals. But what kind of attitude did they have? God warns us about *selfish* ambition—it's one of the fruits of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:20. I still remember that, many years ago, one minister in our former association wanted very much to be promoted to a Regional Director position in a different part of the world, though most didn't think of him as a strong candidate. Sure enough, he didn't receive the position—and he left God's Church soon afterward. He let selfish ambition ruin him. We, too, must be careful not to have that kind of vanity and that kind of ego—not to want to be promoted like the sons of Zebedee.

John the Baptist had the opposite attitude. He said, referring to Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). When we see others increasing their service and their responsibilities, are we jealous and envious? Or do we rejoice in their service and do our very best to support them?

How did Jesus' other disciples react to the presumptuousness of the mother of the sons of Zebedee?

And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so

among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:24–28).

Bondservants

What was the attitude of God's apostles and servants? James was a brother of Jesus Christ—he could have advertised his relationship with the Messiah, but how did he refer to himself in the opening of his epistle? “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1). Though a brother of Jesus, he understood his place as Jesus' servant.

Of course, Christ's brothers were initially very skeptical, and they even came near to slandering Him at first—but after they saw their resurrected Brother, they were converted. You can read about that in Acts 1, when Mary and Jesus' brothers were there in the upper room. James became converted and Jude became converted—and what were their attitudes? How did they identify themselves? As “a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Peter referred to himself as an apostle at times, and so did the Apostle Paul (1 Peter 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1). But despite his authority, the Apostle Peter later gave a different title to himself: “Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). There were times when the Apostle Paul used his authority as an apostle (cf. Romans 1:1), but both of these men also knew and understood that they were bondservants of Jesus Christ.

The Greek word translated “bondservant” is *doulos*, which is “one bound to service without wages” (“Bond Servant,” *Merriam-Webster.com*). Now, the feminine form of that word is *doulé*. Luke recounts the angel speaking to Mary, telling her she would become pregnant—as well as Mary's humbled response:

And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.” Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her (Luke 1:35–38).

Yes, Mary was greatly honored, maybe more than any other woman in the history of the world. The *New International Version* translates verse 38 with “I am the Lord's ser-

vant.” Just think about that! What is your identity? Who are you? The *New American Standard Bible* says that “Mary said, ‘Behold the Lord’s bond-servant; may it be done to me according to your word.’” The *King James Version* says, “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord....” So the translation of *doulé* is “female slave” or “bondmaid.”

Again, Mary knew who she was! She was going to be the mother of the Son of God, yet she called herself a handmaid, a maidservant. Why would she do that? And why would we be called bondservants? You all know the answer, if you have been baptized. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [that] is in you, [which] you have from God, and you are not your own? For *you were bought at a price*; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

We’ve all been bought at a price, the very greatest price ever paid in the history of the world: the shed blood of the Savior, Jesus Christ. So, God has called us to serve in different roles and responsibilities. We are now bondservants in training to become kings, priests, and judges. God also calls us His sons and daughters. “I will be a father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18).

We know that we have a high calling—we have different roles, but part of our training is as bondservants, as maidservants and manservants. We are called to love, to care, and to serve as Mary did.

How Can We Serve?

We know our calling and who we are—we are bondservants of Jesus Christ. So, how can we fulfill that role? There are so many ways of serving, and our commitment must be wholehearted. As our Presiding Evangelist, Mr. Gerald Weston, has reminded us, we must not be trying to have “one foot in the world and one foot in the Church.” We should have made a wholehearted commitment at baptism and deepen that commitment as we grow. And when we realize that we are bought at a price—that we surrendered our lives, our bodies, our spirit, our mind, to Jesus Christ and God the Father, that we belong to Them—we can have the most wonderful peace that surpasses all understanding.

We know that we no longer have to battle on our own, that we have a living, loving Savior—a great High Priest who always lives to intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25). We have an Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1)! Christ is our Savior and even our “Lawyer”—He’s our Intercessor! He sets the example of service, and we must strive to *follow* His example.

What are some ways of serving? Even our elderly widows in God’s Church can serve valuably. Scripture reminds us of one famous example:

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day (Luke 2:36–37).

Anna served with fastings and prayers, and we all have different gifts of service. Anna was not one who could serve like a deaconess, with physical actions and service; rather, she “served God with fasting and prayers night and day.” Another example of someone who served in that way: “Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis” (Colossians 4:12–13).

Epaphras served by laboring fervently in prayer, as do many of our brethren. Nobody should diminish the importance of such service—it is a major way of serving. Remember: “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).

We also serve when we simply fulfill our God-given responsibilities, which are different for each individual. Fathers have fatherly responsibilities. Mothers have motherly responsibilities. Husbands, wives, sons, daughters, executives, employees—all have their own God-given responsibilities.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:18–24).

I remember to this day an article Dr. Meredith first wrote for *The Plain Truth*, which was later republished in the May-June 2013 *Living Church News*: “What Every Husband Needs to Know.” As a husband, I need to lay down my life in service to my wife. Have you noticed that John 3:16 parallels what we read in John’s first epistle? “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods,

and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:16–18).

Are we responsive when our brethren have physical needs? We should not be an enabler to a lazy person who refuses to work as he or she should. He who does not support his family is worse than an infidel, as God warns us through the Apostle Paul (1 Timothy 5:8). But we should rejoice as we are able to meet the needs of our brethren. “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35), or, as the *Moffatt New Translation* puts it, “To give is happier than to get.” I remember that when I was a youngster living in New London, Connecticut, one of our neighbors had an extensive garden, and every so often a box of vegetables would just appear on our back porch. We never spoke about

Another very important point is that we must also be willing to receive help. It may hurt our pride to admit that we need help, but when we receive help we are also helping our helpers. No, **we should not be lazy and ask others to do for us what we can do for ourselves, but we must humbly accept the help God chooses to give us.**

it; he would just give us that box of vegetables. It was very encouraging. Even many in the world know how to give, and we should as well.

Remember that we read, “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38). If someone is scooping out a bowl of ice cream for you, you want to make sure they really fill up the bowl or the cone! God says it will be measured back to us as we have that attitude toward others.

Another very important point is that we must also be willing to *receive* help. It may hurt our pride to admit that we need help, but when we receive help we are also helping our helpers. No, we should not be lazy and ask others to do for us what we can do for ourselves, but we must humbly accept the help God chooses to give us. You may remember the story of the man who was stranded on his rooftop during a flood, who prayed for God’s help but then shooed away a rowboat, a motorboat, and even a helicopter that came to save him. He complained, *God, why haven’t You saved me?*—he failed to recognize all God had done to bring him to safety.

Serve others by giving of your physical goods. Serve with an attitude of giving. God’s Work serves with an attitude of

giving as well. We often mention this principle: “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). Our tithes and offerings make it possible for us to distribute literally millions of pieces of literature each year! When we tithe, we are serving God’s Work in a powerful way!

Servant Leadership

Dr. Meredith often emphasized the importance of servant leadership in the Church. Yes, we have leaders, and we practice the scriptural form of Church government. But what is a leader? In God’s eyes, a leader is one who puts others’ interests ahead of his own:

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (Philippians 2:1–4).

So, as we interact with others, we must always be asking ourselves how we can help them. Not that we always speak that question—though sometimes we *will* speak it—but that we must recognize our God-given responsibilities and carry them out joyfully as bondservants of Christ. Joshua was a great patriarch and a great leader committed to his service in ancient Israel. Near the end of his life, he famously challenged those of the nation of Israel to commit themselves to the Eternal. You may remember his famous statement: “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15). Indeed, Israel did serve the Eternal after Joshua’s death. We need to have that same kind of commitment if we’re going to be faithful and effective servants of God.

So, let’s rejoice in our calling as manservants and maidservants of Jesus Christ. We need to pray for the humility and the opportunity to serve, as well as for a giving attitude. Practice servant leadership daily. “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord’” (Matthew 25:21).

Brethren, may we as faithful servants continue to love others with a willing heart and a serving attitude. May we always be ready to ask, “How may I help you?” (LN)



Using the Holy Spirit: Lessons from Ten Virgins

By **Douglas S. Winnail**

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus spoke the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1–13). This parable is a sobering warning about conditions that will exist in the Church at the end of the age. Its target audience is the generation that will see the return of Jesus Christ! And it is linked with prophecies about the last days that are coming to pass today (cf. Matthew 24–25).

But just how does this parable relate to us, especially as we meditate upon the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? Many mainstream “Christians” assume that Christ spoke in parables to clarify the meaning of His teachings, yet Scripture reveals just the opposite (Matthew 13:10–17). The Bible indicates that God has *hidden* the true understanding of Scripture from the world, but that He *reveals* this vital information through His Spirit to those He is calling (1 Corinthians 2:7–16). Those willing to be led by the Holy Spirit will search out and understand the real meaning of Scripture. As we reflect on the lessons of Pentecost, we should ask ourselves: *What can we learn from the parable of the ten virgins? What lessons relevant to us today can we draw from this parable?*

Five Wise, Five Foolish

We first need to ask, *Who are the ten virgins?* The parable pictures ten virgins who go out to meet a bridegroom, who pictures Jesus Christ. We in God’s Church recognize that the Feast of Pentecost pictures Christ’s firstfruits in this age receiving the Holy Spirit prior to the vast majority of humanity. The parable of the ten virgins, however, reveals something very sobering about true Christians; many will, in fact, be shocked and disappointed to discover that they did not properly use the Holy Spirit. They will find out, to their chagrin, that they never truly acted on what their Savior asked of them, and that they will not receive the reward they anticipated—because they did not learn vital lessons contained in this parable.

We are told that five of the virgins were wise, and five were foolish. But just what does it mean to be wise? What does it mean to be foolish? How does the Bible define these terms? Jesus explains that the wise are those who not only listen to His teachings, but actually *follow* those teachings (Matthew 7:24–27). Jesus defines a foolish person as one who

hears but does not follow the word of God! Foolish people concoct excuses as to why the commandments and instructions of Scripture no longer apply to us today.

The book of Proverbs provides additional definitions. A wise person fears to disobey God’s word—and seeks knowledge, wisdom, and understanding (Proverbs 4:4–9; 9:10). By contrast, “fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7)—they are not willing to put forth the effort required to obtain these important needs. A wise person will seek advice and listen to correction (Proverbs 10:8), but fools ignore advice and resent correction (14:16). A fool reacts to situations with immediate anger, yet a wise person ignores insults and exercises self-control (Proverbs 12:16). Fools are always right in their own eyes and are fully convinced about their own opinions, while a wise person is willing to listen to counsel (Proverbs 12:15; 28:26). A wise person looks ahead, anticipates where decisions and actions will lead, and strives to avoid making mistakes—but fools fail to anticipate the consequences of their actions and repeatedly wind up in trouble (Proverbs 22:3). Our choice of friends also influences what we become, as he “who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Proverbs 13:20).

This part of the parable reminds us to discern the category into which our actions place us! Are we seeking to be led by the Holy Spirit and to follow God’s revealed instructions, or are we continually trying to “reason” around Scripture so we can do our own thing? The fact that this parable says *half* of the virgins were making foolish decisions should grab our attention and serve as a warning to us as we approach the end of this age!

We Need Oil!

The parable describes that the foolish virgins took no oil for their lamps, but that the wise took an extra supply while they waited for the bridegroom to come. Commentaries offer various ideas about what the oil symbolizes (e.g. grace or good deeds), yet the Bible indicates that oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. When Saul and David were chosen as kings of Israel, Samuel anointed them with oil and “the Spirit of the LORD” came upon them (1 Samuel 10:1–6; 16:13). The Bible states clearly that if we want to be in the Kingdom of God, we must bring forth fruits (Matthew 3:8; John 15:1–8). Galatians

5:22–26 lists the fruits of the Spirit, which God wants us to display. These include love, joy, peace, patience, faithfulness, and self-control. Those with the Holy Spirit are reasonable and easily entreated (James 3:17). Other prominent fruits of the Spirit include a sound, discerning mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Those who lack these fruits become impatient, will not listen to input, will focus on themselves, will let go of their faith, will compromise in disobedience, and will fail to discern truth from error. They allow their supply of oil—God’s Spirit—to run low and become exhausted.

The Holy Spirit is dynamic; it ebbs and flows in our lives, depending on how we take care of it and use it. This is why Paul admonished Timothy to “stir up the gift of God” (2 Timothy 1:6). We are also warned, “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19). We stir up God’s Spirit through regular prayer, Bible study, fasting, biblical meditation, and striving to exercise the fruits of that Spirit—acting in a loving and patient manner when our normal tendency would be to fly off the handle! This is what it means to be “led by the Spirit of God” (Romans 8:14). If we are led by the Holy Spirit, we are children of God and heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:14–17). God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). Without God’s Spirit, we are not really Christians (Romans 8:9). If we let our oil supply run low, the fruits of God’s Spirit will not be evident in our lives and we will not be ready to meet Christ when He returns. We will have foolishly wasted our opportunity to be in the first resurrection as firstfruits! This is another vital lesson we can learn from the parable of the ten virgins. When was the last time we checked our oil?

Delays and Distractions

One of the most important aspects of this parable is its description of what happened when the bridegroom delayed his coming. Down through the ages, many have tried to predict when Christ would return. Christ’s first disciples initially thought that He would return in their time (Luke 19:11), even though His words revealed that there would be a long wait (Matthew 24:45–51; 25:5, 14, 19). What we do during that time of waiting reveals much about our conviction and depth of conversion. Most people are flushed with enthusiasm when they first learn the truth—an enthusiasm that too often fades. Jesus warned that some would ignore and break the commandments—and would slip back into self-indulgent worldly ways (Matthew 24:45–51). He also warned that some would stumble and give up the faith as a result of trials and persecution, while others would veer off course in the pursuit of wealth and temporary worldly pleasures (Matthew 13:18–23).

The recent history of the Church of God is instructive in this regard. For the first few decades of Mr. Herbert Armstrong’s ministry, many thought that Christ would likely return in the 1970s. When that did not happen, some began

to drift off into their own religious endeavors. Mr. Armstrong long expected that Christ would return during his lifetime. When he died and Christ had not returned, some began to question whether Mr. Armstrong might have been wrong on many other issues. The ensuing doctrinal disputes and changes led to splits and more fragmentation. Today, many have learned the wrong lessons from those trials—choosing to reject clear commandments and instructions of the Bible, and now believing that all that is necessary is to “love the Lord and believe in Jesus.”

Many scattered in these directions because Jesus Christ did not return when many expected He would. Our challenge, and another lesson of this parable, is to hold on to the truth and to our convictions—not to our “expectations”—and to do the Work zealously and with commitment, as Christ commanded, until He returns! The Bible warns us that, once we have made a commitment to Him, we are not fit for the Kingdom of God if we look back and dwell on what might have been or what we may have “missed” (Luke 9:62). Are we focused on the goal of the Kingdom? Are we wallowing in nostalgia for what we gave up? This parable should be a wake-up call!

Don’t Be Spiritually Asleep!

Do you recognize the significance of the times in which we are living? Are you aware of specific prophecies being fulfilled, almost daily, right in front of your eyes? Or have you been lulled to spiritual sleep by those mainstream “Christians” who say that all prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus and that Old Testament prophecies are not relevant to the beliefs of today’s Christians?

Do you recognize where the Work of God is being done today? Who is really teaching according to Scripture (Isaiah 8:20) and drawing closer to God, and who is changing doctrines to water down the truth? Who is preaching the true Gospel that Jesus and the Apostles preached (Mark 1:14–15), and who is preaching a different gospel (Galatians 1:6–9)? Who is warning the world of the prophetic significance of today’s news events as Christ did (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), and who is deceptively preaching in Christ’s name (Matthew 24:5) about another Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:1–4)? Can you identify those who are wolves out to divide and devour the flock of God? Can you discern those afflicted with a Laodicean attitude? We need to be able to recognize the “midnight cry” when we hear it, because God’s servants will be actively involved in delivering this warning (cf. Isaiah 58:1; Ezekiel 2; 3; 33). However, Satan also has his own false and deceived ministers active at the end of the age! They will deceive many who have begun to spiritually slumber! We cannot afford to spiritually sleep at this crucial time in history (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:1–6)!

How Full Is Your Lamp?

The lamps of the ten virgins illustrate another important lesson. The lamps of the wise virgins who brought oil were burning brightly. Filled with oil, these lamps were able to be a light to the world, fulfilling Christ's expectations for His chosen disciples (Matthew 5:13–16). If we are nourishing the Holy Spirit we have been given, others will see in our lives the fruits of love, obedience, faith, and good works. Regrettably, the lamps of the foolish virgins were going out because they were running out of oil. If we begin to compromise the truth of God and begin to ignore or disobey His laws and instructions, we begin to lose the Spirit of God. The fruits of the Spirit will begin to disappear and will be replaced by self-centered thoughts and actions that are often vain and ugly (Galatians 5:19–21). Sexual sins, arguments, heresies, and divisions will thrive, and unity will evaporate in congregations and families (1 Corinthians 1:10–17). Individuals who let their lamps decline into this condition will not fulfill their calling to become firstfruits in God's Kingdom and will not be able to participate in the wedding after Christ returns! This is a serious warning! We need to discern whether our lamps are burning brightly or going out—if we are not sure, we can ask others what they see. Most importantly, we must ask God to show us the condition of our lamps, and be ready to listen for His answer.

Our Character, Our Responsibility

A particularly sobering lesson of this parable is that whatever amount of faith, courage, character, conviction, preparedness, good works, or degree of conversion someone achieves, we cannot borrow or share what someone else has developed! We are responsible for *ourselves* and for using God's Spirit to work with Him in building our *own* character. And that character will be tested by trials, temptations, and difficulties. If it stands the test, we will be rewarded wonderfully, but our reward will be diminished—and can even be lost—if the character we build fails the test. So, how we build that character and the materials with which we build are very important. We must build carefully and choose our beliefs and actions wisely!

In this regard, we each need to ask some very personal questions. *Have I found the truth? Has my mind been opened to understanding that truth?* Few today are being given the special opportunity that we are being given (Matthew 13:10–17; John 6:44, 65).

Have you invested heavily—of your heart, mind, and energies—in this “pearl of great price” that God has offered you (Matthew 13:44–46), or do you have “itching ears” that move you to “heap up” teachers of your own choosing, who teach fables disguised as “truth” (2 Timothy 4:3–4)? Have you carefully proven what you believe, or do you follow your feelings and listen to the latest doctrinal speculation or self-appointed prophet or teacher who comes along (1 Thessalonians 5:21)?

Are you seeking first the Kingdom of God, or do you make other priorities more important in your life (Matthew 6:33)? Are you striving to grow close to God while He can be found, or are you putting off the most important decisions in life until later (Isaiah 55:6–9)? Are you eagerly anticipating and actively preparing for Christ's return, or are you hoping for more time to enjoy the transient pleasures of this world? Jesus said that our treasure—our investment of money, time, and energy—will be found where our heart is (Matthew 6:19–21). We may fool others, but we do not fool God. The parable of the ten virgins makes it clear that we cannot make it into God's Kingdom on another Christian's effort. We must make the investment and effort ourselves!

Will You Be Ready?

The final lesson of the parable has to do with our state of readiness when Jesus returns. Those who are ready will be firstfruits. Those who are not ready will miss out, even though they hope to be included! So, how do we prepare for Christ's return? Scripture tells us that the bride, preparing for the wedding, “made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7–9). She grew in her understanding of the truth, learned to live by every word of God, built strong and solid Christian character, overcame trials, remained faithful, and zealously endured to the end. She was ready when the bridegroom came. Those who follow this example will be brought into the wedding, after which the door will be shut.

Of course, there are those in the world who believe they will join Christ as His return, but they are mistaken and will be surprised. They may live lives doing what they think is “right,” but not doing what Jesus Christ instructed them to do (Matthew 7:21–23)! God commands us, for example, to “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Jesus and the Apostles kept the Sabbath (Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2), and it will be kept in the Kingdom of God (Isaiah 66:23). To those who ignore such commands in favor of their own ideas, Jesus will say, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matthew 7:23). They will not be invited to attend the wedding—because they will not be ready when the Bridegroom arrives. The door will be shut, and they will be left standing outside, pleading to be let in! The question we each need to ask is, *Where will I be when the door is shut? Will I be seated inside with Jesus Christ, or will I be outside—disillusioned and disappointed?*

The parable of the ten virgins gives us vital lessons not only on Pentecost, as we focus on God's Spirit, but at any time—especially as Christ's return draws near. God inspired these warnings for our benefit because He loves us and wants us to be among His firstfruits in the coming Kingdom of God. We must heed the warnings and learn the lessons of this important parable so we do not miss out on the wonderful reward God wants to give us! (L^N)

A Little Sonder

By Thomas White

There's debate over whether or not it can be called a "real" word, but if you type "sonder" into *Wiktionary*, you'll get this definition: "The profound feeling of realizing that everyone, including strangers passed in the street, has a life as complex as one's own, which they are constantly living despite one's personal lack of awareness of it."

Whether "sonder" is ever accepted as a "real" word, the concept behind it really is profound. It's always encouraging to know that someone cares enough to be aware of us. We all feel a certain level of peace in the knowledge that we're accounted for and considered. That might be why Dale Carnegie wrote that "a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language" (*How to Win Friends and Influence People*, p. 79). This isn't necessarily egotistical; for many people, the feeling seems more akin to gratitude: *Thank you for acknowledging and being aware of me.*

Maybe feeling sonder is just comprehending, however briefly, that *everyone's* life is worth acknowledging as deeply meaningful, complicated, and, to a large extent, unknown to us. It may take surprising effort to internalize that other people are as multifaceted as we are. It might even be a little frightening, because then we must recognize that most of the struggles that define the lives of others are hidden from our perception—and that the excuses we all drum up for condemning other people are pathetic.

Respecting the Author

I'll always remember hearing a professor tell his students, "Every time you read a piece of literature in this class, you are not allowed to say it's bad. You are allowed to say that you don't like it, that you don't understand it, even that you fundamentally disagree with it to your core. But you can't say it's bad or stupid; respect the authors enough to assume they knew what they were doing."

That professor believed that everything read in his class had some value. That's a debatable perspective, because some literature truly is worthless, but I'm glad he voiced his opinion, because it struck me much later that what he said applies in a far more profound way to human beings. *Every* human being is valuable, and should be treated as valuable.

That's all too easy to say: "Every human being is valuable." But we all probably forget it every single day, as we fail to respect the Author of the lives around us enough to assume He knew what He was doing. We can all probably think of ways we dismiss people as being of little value, even if we only

do so unconsciously or in our minds. "You're not worth much to me" may sound a lot more devastating than "I don't care what you think," but if we're honest, don't both essentially mean the same thing?

Even those who know that every human being is made in God's image can sometimes be tempted to think that image is wasted on people whose value we have a hard time seeing. Satan sometimes uses people neck-deep in sinful lifestyles to trick us into thinking that it's *right* to devalue individuals God has created—failing to see the *person* trapped in the sin. Christ warned His followers against that mindset (Luke 9:51–56).

Of course, as the Bible makes abundantly obvious, sinful actions, beliefs, and lifestyles are *never* to be valued. But even the people who completely stray from God's path, trying desperately to rewrite the Author's work in their lives, are still worth more to God than we can imagine (2 Peter 3:9)—as are those who have *stayed* on His path but just really annoy us.

Look, Christ might say, *these people don't have to be your favorites, and you can wholeheartedly disagree with a lot of what they do and say. But they're not worthless. I made them. I died for them.*

Acknowledging the Battle

No one is invisible to God—and that, too, is easy to say, but hard to completely wrap our minds around. *I'd better be kind, because God wants me to be kind*, we might think when we're tempted to *not* be kind. And that's true, but we might be better off thinking, *I'd better be kind, because God wants this person in front of me to experience kindness*. He's deeply aware of you, me, and everyone we interact with. He even knows the number of hairs on their heads (Luke 12:7). And He knows how much they need our empathy.

"Be kind," goes an oft-quoted saying of dubious origin, "because everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." In all His dealings with every one of us, God is never unaware of the struggles we each have every day (Hebrews 4:15). We might not know what the people around us are fighting, but if we want to be like Him, we should strive to treat other people like they're fighting *something* painful, going through *something* hard—because most of the people around us are.

So, say peoples' names when you talk to them. If someone looks sad, ask if they're okay and be prepared to listen if they're not. Smile when you—even accidentally—make eye contact with someone you know. A little sonder might go a long way.

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14). (LW)

Woman to Woman

Lessons of a Cucumber Vine

By **Michelle Grovak**

“**G**randma, this year I want to grow pickles,” answered our eight-year-old grandson when I asked what vegetable he would like to choose for his garden. It was suppertime at the kitchen table, and I had to smile, explaining that the way to get pickles is to start with *cucumbers!* Beginning with his vision of pickles in Mason jars, it was up to me to turn that goal into a summer project of planting, mulching, watering, fertilizing, weeding, and—finally—harvesting and pickling.

Each year, we toil in his little plot, filled mostly with perennial and annual flowers. His garden this year would host sweet burpless cucumbers clinging to a six-foot tower built by his grandpa. But before a single seed was pressed into the soil, Deuteronomy 6:7 came to my mind, wherein the Lord commands us to teach His laws to our children: “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” Our vegetable crop could become so much more than a summer project—it could become a wonderful way to teach some very important principles of Christian living.

Grandma’s Little Gardener

Working side by side, we turned the soil and tucked the seeds into the ground at the depth instructed on the package. (Yes, it is important to follow directions.) We got our hands—and feet—dirty. We watered. We fertilized. We waited. In days, seedlings with two oval leaves popped out of the soil. Grandson was starting to get excited now; each time he came to our house, he would run straight to his tower to see how high the cucumbers were climbing. Next came yellow blossoms, with honeybees buzzing around them. And then, *Look, here is a tiny cucumber fruit at the end of a bloom!*

Finally, one cuke matured enough to pick, followed by many, many more. Grandson put up a “Cucumbers for Sale” sign, selling to kindly neighbors. He gifted cucumbers. We ate them with most suppers. At last, the day arrived when we filled quart jars with refrigerator pickles, some dill and others sweet.

Reflecting on this project, I am awed by the role we women can have in teaching God’s way to the children in our lives while completing everyday activities. Here are some lessons in Christian living taught by way of a cucumber vine:

Begin with the end in mind. Grandson held this concept firmly in mind when he asked to grow pickles, and I pray he will remember this lesson as he matures. To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. Proverbs 21:5 says that the “plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty,” and that adage certainly applies to cucumbers! Beginning with the end in mind is also the second principle of Stephen Covey’s worthwhile book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Having a positive vision and seeing it through to completion is a key to true success.

Patience is a virtue. In this age of instant gratification, children need every opportunity to learn this crucial attribute. And how better to learn patience than by sprouting plants from seeds? I cannot think of a way to “fast forward” a garden. Galatians 5:22 calls patience “longsuffering”—and, for a child, waiting so long might involve some of that! Helping them understand the process involved, and highlighting even tiny hints of progress, builds and encourages patience. Months passed before our grandson tasted the pickled treat he had long desired, but his patience was rewarded.

We will reap what we sow. During our gardening adventure, I often expressed the truth that as you sow, you will reap, asking, “When we plant seeds from a package with a picture of cucumbers, what do you expect to pick later on?” This led to a discussion of Paul’s admonition in Galatians 6:7–9 that what we sow we will reap—and not to grow weary in doing good, for we will reap if we do not lose heart. On the other hand, Proverbs 22:8 considers the evildoer: “He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow....” Working side by side in the fertile, black soil provides an opportunity to discuss God’s blessings for obedience in which God says, “I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce” (Leviticus 26:4). When we sow good seed, we reap good produce—just as, when we sow cucumber seeds, cucumbers are what we reap.

Hard work pays off. Gardening takes effort. It involves sweating, perhaps a sore back, and even an occasional blister. But the rewards are tangible. “He who tills his land will have



plenty of bread, but he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough” (Proverbs 28:19). Proverbs often contrasts the lazy man and the diligent. The lazy man goes hungry, while the worker is fed. We read, “In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty” (Proverbs 14:23). Teaching our children to work hard will hold them in good stead throughout their lives; you will not find an employer complaining that his employee works too hard.

Begin with the end in mind. Grandson held this concept firmly in mind when he asked to grow pickles, and I pray he will remember this lesson as he matures.

God rewards generosity. I like to call Proverbs 11:24 the “Law of Generosity.” It says, “There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty.” Grandson and I go over this verse monthly as we read through Proverbs. Materially speaking, how does it happen that by giving we receive? That occurs only through God’s blessing. It is important to explain to our children that we cannot outgive God. Grandson’s crop was bountiful and he was quick to share his produce. These gifts fed not only the body, but also the soul. One widow at church shed tears when receiving her jar, as it awakened warm memories of her mother’s bread-and-butter pickles.

God expects a tithe of our increase. A garden is an excellent setting in which to discuss the truth that all of creation belongs to the Lord, the master Designer and Creator, and that He gives us so much yet demands just His tithes out of the bounty He provides. God has no need of our money, but He wants us to acknowledge and revere Him, to show grati-

tude, and to support His Work. When my grandson handed me two dollars from his piggy bank to mail to Charlotte, I felt gratified by his willingness. After all, that two dollars might pay for a booklet that could change someone’s life!

There is a season to everything. One early autumn day—after dozens of cucumbers were harvested, but before the first frost—the vines shriveled. It seemed to happen overnight—and that was the end of the season. We cleaned the vines from the tower and removed them from among the lilies, zinnias, and roses. The sudden end of our project offered a time to reflect. Ecclesiastes 3:1–2 states eloquently, “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted....” Solomon understood that God has made everything beautiful in its time (v. 11). Just as we enjoyed the beauty of the vines and the fruit they produced, we accepted that every living thing—be it plant, animal, or human—has an expiration date. This is something for grandmothers to consider after experiencing many trips around the sun.

Sweet Spiritual Fruit

Our gardening project was a success, both physically and spiritually. Thinking back on it brings me joy. In addition, contemplating our cucumber adventure awakens visions of next year’s gardening possibilities. Will we grow cucumbers? Strawberries? Potatoes? The choice is not mine. However, this grandma is already pondering godly principles to be planted in a child’s heart and mind while weeding and watering. Perhaps the principle of sowing bountifully versus sparingly? How about the necessity of the seed dying to produce a glorious crop, or comparing the Kingdom of God to a tiny seed that grows large?

This grandma can hardly wait to get planting! (L)

Mars and Beyond: God's Awesome Universe

By **Juliette McNair**

Editor's Note: *The following is a summary of a recent Forum given to the Living Education—Charlotte students by Dr. Roedolph Opperman. He and his family now reside and attend services in the Charlotte, North Carolina, area. We hope you enjoy reading about Dr. Opperman's presentation discussing the Mars 2020 mission—and his reflections on God's marvelous works—as much as we did!*

Dr. Roedolph Opperman gave the Living Education Forum on March 2—64 days before the Living Education graduation, according to the students' countdown. Dr. Opperman works for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory as a systems engineer and is part of the team that landed the Mars rover *Perseverance* on February 18. For 90 days following the landing, Dr. Opperman's team worked by clocks adjusted to "Mars time," since Martian days are 40 minutes longer than Earth days.

"Our job is to try to *break* the spacecraft—well, not really. It's way too expensive for that," he said jokingly. Dr. Opperman is a Fault Protection Specialist, and his team was responsible for finding out "what could potentially go wrong." Whether software glitches or cable breaks, they had trialed the rover and programmed the computers to detect problems and self-correct. Here on Earth, the engineers can use an identical rover to simulate *Perseverance* and gauge its performance before sending commands to the Mars rover.

The Challenge of Getting to Mars

One key challenge of the mission was landing the rover safely. NASA engineers call EDL—Entry, Descent, and Landing—the "seven minutes of terror." Dr. Opperman explained that the vehicle must enter, descend, and land on its own. On average, it takes about ten minutes for a message from *Perseverance* to reach the earth—so for that length of time the engineers had no idea if the vehicle had landed or crashed.

When the spacecraft carrying *Perseverance* reached Mars, friction caused heat on the spacecraft to reach 2,370 degrees Fahrenheit; a heat shield protected the spacecraft and its precious cargo as it hurtled through the planet's atmosphere. Then, a supersonic parachute 70 feet in diameter—able to withstand more than 65,000 pounds of force—deployed and slowed the spacecraft's descent. The heat shield was dropped and the spacecraft secured a radar lock on the ground. As the craft separated from its parachute, rockets were used to

divert it away from the parachute and slow its descent even more. At 65 feet above the surface, cables lowered *Perseverance* from the hovering craft to the ground in what is called a "sky crane" maneuver. Every step of EDL had to occur autonomously and in perfect coordination.

"I've been working on this project for three years—some have been working on it for eight years or more. For some people, this is what life is all about," Dr. Opperman commented. One objective of the mission was to find out if there was ever ancient life on Mars. For this purpose, the rover was equipped with different tools, like ground-penetrating radar, UV and X-ray spectrometers, a laser, several cameras, and a drill for taking soil samples.

Another objective was to test MOXIE, a system that can convert carbon dioxide from the Mars atmosphere into oxygen for humans to breathe. NASA aims to land humans on Mars by the 2030s, and private companies like SpaceX are also racing to establish colonies on the planet.

But, as Dr. Opperman pointed out, "Humans aren't designed for space." The weightlessness of space—without the gravity earth exerts on a body—causes bones to demineralize and muscles to atrophy without at least 90 minutes of daily exercise. Also, without Earth's protective atmosphere and magnetic field, space radiation poses *the* major threat to human exploration of space.

Building Planets

"Let's take a step back," Dr. Opperman said. We'd gotten a glimpse of how hard it is just to get a rover to another planet in our solar system. That took thousands of people thousands of days to achieve, while singlehandedly "God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). He created everything we see and don't see—like theorized dark matter, the entire spectrum of light, and the spiritual realm.

Even though the Earth is as a speck of dust in the vast universe, Dr. Opperman reminded the students that it will be where "the headquarters of the universe, New Jerusalem, is established." He quoted Paul, who stated, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Dr. Opperman said, "The Mars rover is so minute compared to what God can create.... As humans, we have this desire to explore—but as spirit beings, we can be on the other side of the galaxy, and not just build rovers but build planets."

When asked what his plans were for after the Mars rover project, Dr. Opperman replied, "Get some sleep. I have a toddler—I'm not *really* on Mars time." ^(LN)

Faith in a Father

By Justin Stewart

A couple of years ago, my wife and I learned that our son was allergic to nuts. I had given him some candy with nuts in it and he started complaining about his tongue itching. I knew immediately that he was having an allergic reaction and we gave him some medicine. But then he started complaining about being unable to breathe. As we quickly prepared to take him to the hospital, he looked at me with tears streaming down his face and genuine fear in his eyes and asked, “Am I going to die?” I will never forget his look or his words.

Am I going to die? It’s a question you don’t expect a five-year-old to ask. But he did. And who did he ask? His father—his daddy.

Why did he ask me? I feel that my son asked me because, in his mind, his daddy could fix *anything*—his daddy would fix *this*. My son had faith that I would help him, and there is a profound lesson in that.

My kids come to me with all sorts of questions and to have me fix stuff. When children are young, their dad is their first superhero. Their dad “can do anything.” In fact, their dad “can beat up your dad,” right? It’s almost like, to them, their dad is somewhat like God.

Do we have that faith in our Father?

No Fear Too Great

My son was scared, and for good reason. How often are we scared? How often do we have such fear, yet not know how to handle it? How often, when we are afraid, do we have the faith to go to our Father and cast our fears upon Him? My son’s fear was of dying, and not all of our fears are that extreme, but even when our fear is slight, we should be going to God.

Remember what 1 Peter 5:6–7 says: “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

God cares for us as a father cares for his children. I wanted so badly to alleviate my son’s fear. I took him in my arms and tried to comfort him. God wants to do that for us as well, and we should be willing to go to Him for help. We should ask Him for the courage to stand up to whatever we may face and have the faith that our Father will take care of it in the best way.

There are so many times in our lives when we are afraid—maybe we fear getting sick, maybe we fear losing a job, maybe we even fear losing a loved one. What are we doing in these times? Are we struggling to deal with our fear? Are we going to God on our knees? Are we asking our Father in heaven for help and courage? Are we crying out, *Abba, Father, help me face this problem I’m having, take this fear from me, and comfort me in Your arms?* If we aren’t doing this, why not?

No Prayer Too Small

We need to have the faith to ask our Father to take away our fear. If we go to Him with our fear, He will comfort us in His arms. In the March-April 2020 *Tomorrow’s World* magazine article “Seven Steps to Happiness,” Mr. Wallace Smith reminds us to spend time in prayer, writing, “God tells us to let our thanksgiving and our requests ‘be made known to God.’ One of our greatest sources of happiness and encouragement is the knowledge that our Savior loves us and can be trusted with every one of our concerns!”

We will all face trials in which we stumble and feel that we are too afraid to continue, but we always have a choice: admit defeat and leave the race, or get up and finish. God wants to help us finish our race, and we must have the faith to ask Him to do so. We must be humble enough to admit that we’re scared, we’re weak, and we need His help.

There are times when we’re afraid or hurt, times when the race looks impossible to finish. When those times come, we must cry out and have the faith to look to our Father in heaven to come out of the stands, put His comforting arms around us, and help us finish our race. (L)

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If you ever make purchases through Amazon, please consider using Amazon Smile. When you shop at *Smile.Amazon.com*, 0.5 percent of the price of your eligible purchases will be donated to the Church. Just sign in online at *Smile.Amazon.com* and select the Living Church of God as your

charity. You can then purchase the *same* products at the *same* prices, but Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase to LCG. This is a free, easy way for you to generate donations to the Church, and, if we all do this, it could result in thousands of dollars a year in extra contributions that we

can put to work preaching the Gospel around the world.

While 0.5 percent may not seem like much, over time it really adds up. To date, members shopping through Amazon Smile have generated more than \$13,000 in extra donations! Thank you for your prayers and your support of God’s Work!

Records and Information Services: An Interview with Mrs. Lori Lyons

By Editorial Staff

Change happens fast in our modern world, and we all know how hard it can be to stay up to date. Thankfully, the Living Church of God stays updated as a result of the diligent efforts of its Records & Information Services (RIS) Department. Currently staffed by Mrs. Lori Lyons, Ms. Ginger Baugh, Mrs. Laura Denny, Mrs. Jen Friddle, Ms. Meredith Hodges, and Ms. Claudia Zambrano, and overseen by Database Architect Mr. Josh Penman, Headquarters' RIS team carefully updates the records of members, prospective members, subscribers, and much more.

We at the Living Church News recently interviewed Mrs. Lori Lyons, RIS employee for the past 19 years, to find out just how this small but essential department works.

How and why does RIS help the Church stay up to date in its records?

Lori L.: We update the Church Survey—so, when people get baptized, we have a record of that. When Church youth turn 18, we update the database to include them as prospective members, which means they can get their own *Living Church News* and that kind of thing. When marriages start and when babies are born, we update the database with that information. It's always exciting when people get married or have a baby—we in RIS kind of race each other to see who's going to update the database!

What that does is allow Church Administration to do queries on the database and find out how many teens we have in the Church, how many we're going to have in five years, how many senior citizens we have, how many we're going to have—everything like that. Information used to plan locations for the *Tomorrow's World* Presentations comes from the database, too.

We also work with the ministry when someone contacts us and wants to attend services. We send their file from the database to the minister closest to them, so that the minister knows what literature they've received. It gives the minister a little bit of a heads-up, as far as how long this person has been in contact with *Tomorrow's World*. We also put people in contact with ministers when they call and ask, "Is there a congrega-

tion in my area?" We're the ones who give them the nearest minister's number.

What would you say is the most powerful way RIS supports preaching the Gospel?

Lori L.: Every literature request comes through RIS. Whether it's from a call center fielding responses to the telecast, requests from the website, phone calls to the office, cards stitched into the booklets—all of that, in one form or another, comes through this department. Thankfully, we use an electronic tool to upload addresses.

It's always exciting when we hear the announcements regarding how many items the Mail Processing Department has mailed out, because MPD receives information from RIS, and when you're processing requests from day to day, you don't really think about the sheer number of those requests. If you're working on something like requests made in response to the semi-annual letter, you have a huge stack of processed requests on paper at the end of the day, but if you're electronically uploading, you may process a couple thousand requests but seemingly have nothing to show for it—it just seems like you sat there all day clicking. So, it's really cool to hear that thousands of items were sent out.

What do you find most challenging about working in RIS?

Lori L.: The first thing that pops into my head is people not using their PINs! The difference in having the PIN and not having a PIN is huge. For example, with a PIN on a Holy Day offering, we can upload it in about three seconds. If we have to look you up by your name or your address, that can take anywhere from 30 seconds to a minute. When you're multiplying that over hundreds of people, it adds up very quickly. So, that's the reason why they announce before Holy Day offerings, *Please use your green envelope! Or, Use your PIN!* Please write your PIN in your Bible—we would really appreciate that!

On a more serious note, a challenge for me is that sometimes, it is personal—when people leave the Church, we have to make them "former members" in the database. And that's hard, especially when they are people you know, people

you've spent time with. But we live in the knowledge that God doesn't lose people. They don't have to be in our database for Him to know where they are and what they need.

It's also personal when people call in and yell at you and tell you that you're a heretic, saying horrible things about the Church's leadership and stuff—and then the phone is ringing for the next call, and you have to hang up from that terribly nasty person and answer the next call like it's a brand new day. You've got to mentally reboot with every call.

With COVID and the lockdowns and stuff, people call and want to know where their literature is. They're angry that they haven't gotten it—but we've sent it, and once it leaves the Headquarters building, it's out of our hands. People have even accused us of lying: *You're telling me that you're sending it and you're not.* That can be a test.

"I think one of the most rewarding things is when someone makes that next step to wanting to attend services. When they make that step and they call in, sometimes when you pull up their file to see who the minister covering their area is, you see that **'I created this file—I was the one who processed their first letter!'"**

How have RIS operations grown and changed over the years?

Lori L.: Back in the Worldwide Church of God, they had a much bigger mailing list, of course, but they also had to type everything out—they couldn't print a label, like we can. So, they had to have a *lot* more people. Now, we essentially have the same number of people that we had when I got hired 19 years ago, and we're getting a lot more done. Our supervisor, Mr. Josh Penman, is just absolutely fantastic about creating tools for us that enable us to enter things more quickly.

For example—and this is one way that the Editorial Department has helped us—when I was hired, the semi-annual response cards were blank, so when people sent them in, they wrote their name and their address on that slick paper, so the ink smeared and you were dependent on their handwriting. Sometimes they would use it to request things for others instead, people who weren't in the database, so you're searching and searching and searching—only to find, *This person's not in the database; this is a referral.* So, it was very labor-intensive. Now, Mr. Josh Penman has created the program for us that enables us to scan each card. And not only is that person's

PIN in the barcode, but also the offer itself. So, we can scan it, and it automatically tells the database to send the new DVD to whoever the person is, so it only takes a second.

Again, that's not to say it's completely rote—you spend a lot of time sorting. The count room helps us out; they're pulling things out and they're double-checking to make sure that the information on the card is exactly what was on the envelope, that kind of thing. But if we were still doing it the way we were doing it 19 years ago, we would have to have five times as many people, because when the semi-annual responses start coming in, not only are they coming in envelopes, but people are calling: *I don't have a stamp; can I request this over the phone?* The number of phone calls jumps—everything kind of spikes, so it gets busy.

We're always looking for ways to streamline, and that's one reason why we can do this with so few people—over the years, we've looked for ways to make this faster, more efficient.

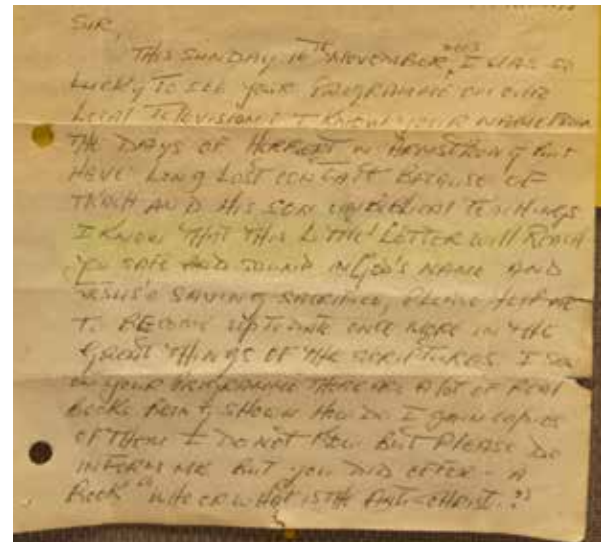
We incorporate new things as we go, so it is ever changing. Editorial has been wonderful with the stitch-ins—every booklet now has two stitch-in cards, which means that every time somebody gets a booklet, they send two cards back. Sometimes they get three booklets, so they send six cards back. Back when we first started using the stitch-ins, they all basically looked alike—the only thing that was different was the title of the booklet that was being offered, which made it really hard to sort them. Editorial has been wonderful with switching up the colors. I was so excited the first time we got one of the cards and it was red! With things like that, we've

been working together as a team to streamline and do things more efficiently, effectively, and accurately.

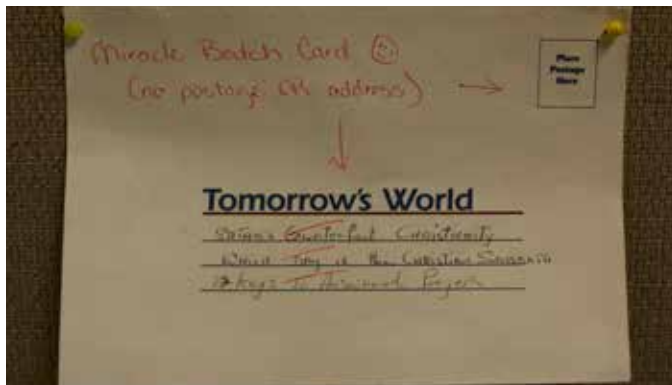
To you, what's the most rewarding part of working in RIS?

Lori L.: I think one of the most rewarding things is when someone makes that next step to wanting to attend services. When they make that step and they call in, sometimes when you pull up their file to see who the minister covering their area is, you see that *I created this file—I was the one who processed their first letter!*

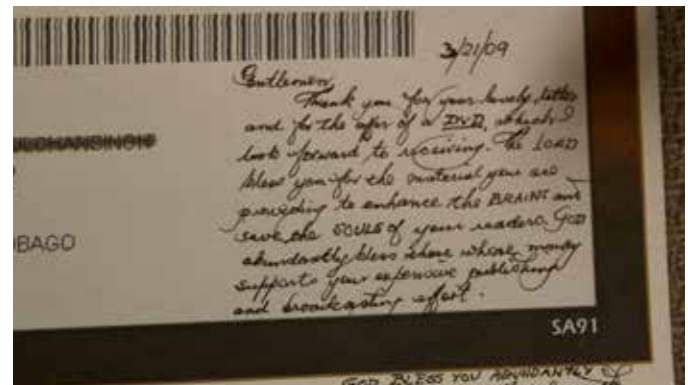
Or, sometimes, when you're doing Church Survey updates, a minister will call and he'll have a baptism notice or something like that, and you'll pull up the file to update the person who was baptized from a prospective member to a full member, and you see that you're the one who put them in touch with a minister, however long ago. That's really cool and always rewarding, to see it come full circle like that. A young woman in our local area was baptized recently, and I created her file when I was first hired, when she was a tiny kid. You feel like, *How neat is that?*



This letter miraculously made it to RIS from Guyana after its envelope was almost completely destroyed! God ensured that all of the most necessary elements of HQ’s address remained on the fragment of the envelope. In the accompanying letter, shown above, the author wrote, “I know that this little letter will reach you safe and sound in God’s name.” And God certainly rewarded that confidence!



Since this card had no postage and had booklet titles where the address should have been, it was undoubtedly by God’s hand that it arrived safely at RIS!



This encouraging card won the RIS “award” for smallest legible handwriting!



From left to right: Mrs. Lori Lyons, Ms. Meredith Hodges, Ms. Ginger Baugh, Ms. Claudia Zambrano, and Mrs. Laura Denny. (L)

Births

Randolph Jeremy John was born on October 12 to Mr. and Mrs. Jerry (Reena) John from the Kuala Lumpur congregation in Malaysia, right after they returned from the Feast of Tabernacles. He weighed 3 kilograms and measured 50 centimeters in length. Mother and son are doing well, and elder sisters Javelyn and Jacquelyn were thrilled to meet their little brother. The Malaysian brethren also welcome

this wonderful addition to the Church family.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard (Mandy) Roth are excited to announce the arrival of their fourth and fifth children! **Jacen Andrew Roth** and **Gabriel Charlie Roth** were born on January 2. The twin boys both weighed 6 pounds and were 19 inches long. Mother, babies, and family are all doing great!

Wyn Elliot Sheffield was born on December 18 to Mr. and Mrs. Daniel (Shannon) Sheffield of the Auckland congregation in New Zealand. He weighed 3.6 kilograms and measured 51 centimeters.

Landon Noah van der Watt was born on January 25 to Mr. and Mrs. Stefan (Rebekah) van der Watt of the Phoenix, Arizona, congregation.

In Loving Memory

Mr. Bruno Bozkewycz, 96, died on January 6 with family at his side. He lived a full life, enduring the hardships of World War II in Europe during his youth but also being blessed with joys, such as being called into God's Family. Baptized in 2010, he was a beloved member of the Melbourne congregation in Australia and attended services regularly despite his age. He is fondly remembered and will be greatly missed.

Mr. James Brandon, 63, died on January 22. Mr. Brandon met his future wife Peggy in 1975, the year he graduated from high school. They were married in 1985, were baptized together in 1986, and had two children. He delighted in teaching his family many things, including how to drive a car, how to use his tools, how to plant rose bushes, and even his technique for making great barbeque. Mr. Brandon served in the Memphis, Tennessee, congregation in many ways over the years. He loved God's truth and the Holy Days and rarely missed a Sabbath or Church social function. He was always willing to lend a helping hand. He enjoyed simply visiting with the brethren and occasionally called them just to say hello and ask how they were doing. He is survived by his wife, their daughter, their son, their daughter-in-law, their two grandchildren, and a host of other relatives and friends. He will be greatly missed.

Mr. Robert Bumpus, Jr., 73, died on February 24. A Vietnam veteran, he long suffered from exposure to Agent Orange and other effects of his service there. While working offshore on an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico, he fell 30 feet, landing on a steel deck. To everyone's amazement, he survived. In prison

at one point in his life, he was in solitary confinement with only a Bible to read. It was the first time he had read the Bible, and it changed his life, though it would still be many years before his baptism into God's Church. He said that he finally realized then that God had kept him alive for a reason. Ill health prevented him attending Sabbath services with the Laurel, Mississippi, congregation. Mr. Bumpus was preceded in death by his daughter, and is survived by his wife.

Mrs. Inge de Groot, 85, died peacefully on January 7 after a long illness. She had been a baptized member of the Edmonton, Alberta, congregation for 15 years. Mrs. de Groot is survived by a son and daughter-in-law, one grandson, and several great-grandchildren.

Mr. John Finney, 83, died on February 18. He and his wife Gloria were baptized in 1968 and he served for many years as a deacon in God's Church. She predeceased him by just over two years. One of Mr. Finney's great efforts in life was to seek the truth and convey it to others. He frequently commented, "If being in God's Church teaches us anything about ourselves, it is how far short we fall from perfect." He is survived by three children, ten grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. The brethren in the Lake City, Florida, congregation miss Mr. Finney, as they do his wife.

Mr. James Michael Frantik, 67, died on January 8. He was a longtime member of God's Church and attended the Edmonton, Alberta, congregation. Over the course of his life he served as a firefighter (including a wildlands firefighter), in

Search and Rescue operations, and in many other activities in the outdoors. He is survived by his wife, three daughters, and six grandchildren, all of whom he loved deeply. The brethren miss his cheerful and sociable presence at services.

Mr. Dan Allen Johnson, 74, died November 17. Mr. Johnson's positive attitude was contagious and his loving, caring approach to people made him beloved by many. He served in outreach to troubled teens and loved to teach gardening to young people. For many years he was a supervisor for the Parks and Maintenance Department of Placer County, a job in which he took great pride. Baptized in 1978, he was always available to give a helping hand in the Sacramento, California, congregation. He loved his Church family and valued his friends. After a stroke left him with many health problems, he continued to push himself to be productive and engaged in life. He will be deeply missed by all who knew him.

Mrs. Della Horn Landwehr, 87, died on January 27. Baptized in 1955, she attended Ambassador College in Pasadena, California, beginning that fall. She was a member of the Big Sandy, Texas, congregation of the Living Church of God.

Mr. George Robert McGraw, 78, died on January 11. Baptized in 1967, he was a member of the Kansas City, Missouri, congregation. He is survived by family members including a brother and a sister-in-law.

Mrs. Mignon Wall Newton, 103, died November 2. She attended the Sacramento, California, congregation. Because Mrs. Newton's husband George was a Foreign Service Officer, they lived in several countries over the years and she maintained regular correspondence with many friends around the world. Mr. and Mrs. Newton had four daughters. Mrs. Newton was baptized in 1964. She served as a deaconess and also as pianist for services. An accomplished musician, she taught singing, piano, and organ. She is survived by three daughters, seven grandchildren, and 20 great-grandchildren.

Dr. John Riehm, 72, died on December 13 with his family by his side. A longtime Church member and for many years an elder, he attended the Louisville, Kentucky, congregation, where he is greatly missed. Dr. Riehm was a positive and active person whose warm and encouraging nature uplifted others. He is survived by his wife, one son, one daughter, three grandchildren, and many other beloved relatives. An allergist, he was also loved by his patients, as well as those on his medical team.

Mr. Robert Silva, Jr., 81, died on January 7. He was a longtime and active member in the New Orleans, Louisiana, congregation. Mr. Silva loved the brethren and all the brethren loved him, always looking forward to seeing him when his health allowed him to attend services. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic and in declining health, he had his son bring him to services as often as possible. A retired brick- and stone-mason, Mr. Silva was a kind and gentle man. He will be sorely missed and never forgotten. He is survived by one son, three daughters, several grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and many other relatives.

Mr. Robert Virgil Spain, 77, died on March 11. Baptized in 2009, he attended the Rolla, Missouri, congregation until deteriorating health prevented him from doing so. Through it all, he loved God's truth, God's Church, and God's people. He is survived by his wife Patricia, also a member, and three children, and he will be missed by all who knew him.

Mr. Raymond F. Waller, 85, of Key West, Iowa, died peacefully in his sleep at home on January 25. Mr. Waller farmed his entire life. He and his wife Joan were married in August 1962 and shared 58 years. They were both baptized in May 1970 and he served as a deacon in the Dubuque, Iowa, congregation. Mr. and Mrs. Waller had four children, including Wanda (Mrs. Joseph Ross), also of the Dubuque congregation; twelve grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren. Mr. Bob Rodzaj and Mr. Irv Woelfle officiated at his funeral.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Miss Erin Elizabeth Roe and **Mr. Nathan Allen Craig** were married on a cold and snowy January 10 in Tyler, Texas. The bride is the daughter of Mrs. Dana Collins and Mr. Tim Roe, and the stepdaughter of Mr. Rick Collins of the Dallas, Texas, congregation, and the groom is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Jerry (Valerie) Craig of the Temple, Texas, congregation. Mr. Wallace Smith, the groom's uncle, conducted the ceremony. Though the five inches of snow made travel difficult, many family members and friends attended the ceremony and rejoiced with the happy couple, enjoying Texas barbecue at the reception that followed.

ORDINATIONS

Mr. John E. Adams and **Mr. Chester A. Carpenter** were ordained as elders on the Sabbath of January 16 by Regional Pastor Jeffrey Fall and elder Arnold Lalum. Mr. Adams and Mr. Carpenter serve in the Helena, Montana, congregation.

Mr. Brook Austin was ordained a deacon on the Sabbath of January 23 by Area Pastor Brandon Fall and elders Frank Dickinson and Gary Pate. Mr. Austin serves in the Portland, Oregon, congregation.

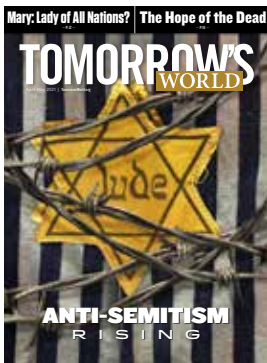
Mr. John Boyd was ordained a deacon on the Sabbath of January 16 by Area Pastor Brandon Fall and elders Frank Dickinson and Gary Pate. Mr. Boyd serves in the Tacoma, Washington, congregation.

Mr. Gary Chantra was ordained a deacon on the Sabbath of February 20 by Regional Pastor Adam West. Mr. Chantra serves in the Rochester, New York, congregation.

Mr. Ryan Dawson of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation, was ordained an elder on April 10. The or-

dination was conducted by Mr. Gerald Weston, Mr. Richard Ames, Dr. Douglas Winnail, Mr. Mario Hernandez, and Mr. John Strain. Mr. Dawson, his wife Brandie, and their daughter Finley are heading shortly to North Florida for Mr. Dawson to work with Area Pastor Mr. Joe Brown.

Mr. Garrett Steagall was ordained a deacon on the 2020 Feast of Trumpets by Evangelist Douglas Winnail, Area Pastor Mark Sandor, and elder Errol Wade. Mr. Steagall serves in the Minneapolis, Minnesota, congregation.



Behind the April-May 2021 Cover: Anti-Semitism Rising

Pictured here is the cover of the April-May 2021 issue of *Tomorrow's World* magazine, warning of anti-Semitism's ominous resurgence in recent years. Its image—the yellow star that Nazi officials forced European Jews to wear, overlaid on a concentration camp uniform behind barbed wire—sharply evokes the horrors to which anti-Semitism has led in years past. This cover references Mr. Stuart Wachowicz's eye-opening article "The Truth About Anti-Semitism." Mr. Wachowicz comments:

To the shock and dismay of many, anti-Semitic slogans, symbols, and demonstrations are once again attempting to focus contempt on those of Jewish heritage. What was, not all that long ago, thought of as a relic of the past that disappeared in the flames that consumed the Nazi movement in 1945 is resurfacing in messages of hatred.

Why? What is the cause of the anger and vitriol that has been emitted over the centuries against a people who have contributed so much to mankind's betterment in sciences, medicine, literature, and other areas of endeavour? What is the rationale behind such intense anti-Jewish emotion?

This article explores the origin and motivation behind anti-Semitism in a manner you may not have considered. It also shows that the risk posed to all mankind by anti-Semitic ideas is profound, striking at the very heart of human conscience and rule of law. Anti-Semitism is shown as an attempt to destroy the conscience of humanity.

The cover also highlights Mr. Gerald Weston's uplifting article "The Hope of the Dead," in which he boldly presents the biblical truth of resurrection. In addition, it features Dr. Douglas Winnail's enlightening "Mary: Lady of All Nations?," which reveals how mainstream "Christianity" has developed a pagan counterfeit of the historical mother of Jesus Christ.

—Editorial Staff

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Thirsty for Knowledge of God

What did *you* learn today? I don't know about you, but any day I learn something new is a very good day! And the best part is, you're never too old to learn new things.

Case in point, I once read a very inspiring story about a very special student. He graduated several years ago from Laval University with a bachelor's degree in biochemistry. What is so special about that? He received his diploma at the age of 81! In his own words, "I enrolled in the program not because I wanted the diploma but I wanted to have access to all the courses available in that field. If most students take 15 credits per semester to receive their diploma in three years, I did the reverse; I took three credits per semester to receive my diploma 15 years later" ("Biochimiste diplômé à 81 ans," *Contact*, University of Laval, Autumn 2012, p. 7). Furthermore, his wife added that "he always had a visceral need for knowledge, to learn, to know." He was *thirsty for knowledge*.

Jesus Christ declared, "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it" (Mark 10:15). One common character trait of little children is their thirst to learn. Have you ever watched a child working on a jigsaw puzzle? The first time he attempts it, he labors, takes time, and struggles. Then, when he finishes, he looks at it for just a little while before taking it apart and completing it again. With each new attempt, he completes it quicker and quicker, and he enjoys it more and more.

Young children are also eager to do things with their parents. Have you ever noticed the happiness a child exudes

when he is able to prepare his first pancake, or eggs, or whole breakfast, by himself? When he is able to complete his first music solo? When he comes home with his first perfect score on a test?

How about us, as adults? Do we still have, whatever our age, a thirst for knowledge? When was the last time you learned something new about mathematics, history, or science? Or about how something is made?

More importantly, do we have a thirst for knowledge of the ways of God? How deep is *your* knowledge of the Bible and its message?

Just as our children want to learn from us, do we have the urge to learn from our Father? Do we look forward to studying the word of God—to opening the pages of His book and learning about His way of life? Ancient King David thirsted for God to teach him His ways. He wrote, "Blessed are You, O LORD! Teach me Your statutes" (Psalm 119:12). He added, "Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments" (v. 66). Ten times in Psalm 119 alone, David expresses his thirst to have God teach him His ways. This great king of Israel had an ardent desire to learn from God. "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me" (vv. 97–98).

How well do we really apply these words to our lives? Let's strive to continue learning from God so that we can sincerely say, "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (vv. 103, 105).

—Marc Arseneault