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Don't Neglect the Depth of Proverbs

Dear Brethren,

How much do we appreciate the book of Proverbs? Whether we are young and inexperienced or older and wiser, it contains a wealth of wisdom for us all. Solomon compiled the Proverbs “to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.” He further added, “A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel” (Proverbs 1:4–5).

Many read a chapter of Proverbs each day, as the book contains 31 chapters, aligning with most months. Others turn to Proverbs for a quick study when pressed for time. However, the key is not how many *times* we read something, but *how* we read. As Jesus instructs us, “Therefore take heed how you hear” (Luke 8:18). *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* gives the reminder that “receptive listening [reading] leads to fuller understanding, but refusal to listen will mean deprivation of even the opportunity to listen” (Third Edition, p. 901).

Jesus also taught that we are to become as little children if we hope to see the Kingdom of God. “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). Christ no doubt had several childlike characteristics in mind when He said this, but one of them is certainly the trust that small children place in their parents.

We, too, must trust our heavenly Parent’s judgment, especially when it contradicts our human reasoning. It is dangerous to rely on our natural instincts. More than one proverb reminds us to look to God at all times. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart

from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones” (Proverbs 3:5–8; see also 14:12 and 16:25).

Another proverb warns us, “A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment. A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart” (18:1–2). Over the decades, how many people have we seen with “a new understanding,” “a new doctrine,” “a new timeline for Christ’s return”? Such people are so convinced they are right that they will rely solely on their own devices—even though no one agrees with them. Their problem is pride, and “when pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom” (11:2). For all their supposed understanding, they ignore admonitions to seek wise counsel (12:15).

Indeed, maintaining the right frame of mind is essential, and that is why the introduction to this book comes with this vital truth: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7).

God’s Truth, Not Our Own

Sadly, not everyone who attended Ambassador College got the message. A few individuals—very few, but a foolish few—got caught up in illegal get-rich-quick schemes, disregarding Solomon’s very first warning after his preamble: “My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.... So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its owners” (1:10, 19).

Though none of these individuals engaged in violence, several spent time in prison—not for righteousness’ sake, but for greed and dishonesty. Tragically, as did Sapphira (Acts 5:1–10), more than one wife became involved in her husband’s scheme and also experienced incarceration. Every one of

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them must have read the first chapter of Proverbs, but they never understood it.

Many sincere Bible students draw wisdom from Proverbs, even without God's Spirit. It does not take God's Spirit to understand that "he who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (10:4), or "where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (11:14), or "he who is surety for a stranger will suffer, but one who hates being surety is secure" (11:15). Yet God's Spirit offers so much more, "for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10–11). Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide us into all truth (John 16:13). It teaches us and brings to our remembrance what we need to know when we need to know it (John 14:26).

Some proverbs are very straightforward, while others carry meanings with varied applications. Some, translating idiomatic expressions into English, are downright difficult to discern. It is also easy to misinterpret a proverb based on our own biases. When I was in my mid-teens, I read, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love" (27:5, *Revised Standard Version*). I still have the copy of the *Revised Standard Version* my mother gave me some 65 years ago, and that verse is one of the few proverbs I underlined. Why?

While I find it embarrassing to admit, I misunderstood those words on the basis of my personal circumstances. As do many teenage boys, I found it terrifying to ask a girl out on a first date, but I took courage from this proverb—or at least from my take on it. I thought it meant that it is better to be turned down by a girl than to be her secret admirer. Regardless of whether that is true, it is not at all what the proverb means. The first half of the sentence has to do with rebuking or correcting someone, and the second half is obscure enough that Hebrew scholars have different opinions about its intent—but, nevertheless, I totally misapplied it. To misinterpret a proverb is to obscure the wisdom it offers.

Application Through Meditation

Sometimes a proverb can have a variety of applications depending on circumstances. For instance, "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished" (27:12), can apply to a multitude of situations, such as being tempted to get caught up in adultery (9:13–18), climbing a dangerous cliff, marrying outside the Church (Nehemiah 13:25–27), failing to tithe faithfully, leaving home during a blizzard, not knowing the state of your flocks and attending to their needs (Proverbs 27:23), and countless other ways. This is why meditation is important.

Then there are proverbs with practical applications that may not be immediately clear. Here is one example: "Prepare your outside work, make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterward build your house" (24:27). We normally—and rightly—apply this to a young man keeping his priorities straight by securing an income before getting married. This is no doubt the intent of the proverb, but does it have other applications?

Consider that when Dr. Roderick C. Meredith was removed from the apostatizing Worldwide church after Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's death, he immediately followed Christ's instruction and began preaching the Gospel and giving a warning to the world. This was his top priority—following Christ's command. He did not neglect the flock God was calling, but his priority was to look outward rather than focus inward. Unlike some who left Worldwide, he quickly went on radio and television and began publishing booklets and magazines. And what was the fruit? Members of that former association have continued, even to this day, to join us—but quite a few members of the Living Church of God have no background with our former association.

Proverbs 24:27 is about priorities, doing first what we most need to do, which is a principle Dr. Meredith exemplified. In light of this proverb, we can look back at his example and see the importance of setting the correct priorities—and we can be thankful that he did first things first, which we in the Living Church of God strive to continue to do.



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Defining How God's Way Works

Short, pithy sayings abound in our world, such as, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” The repetition and juxtaposition of *going* and *tough* make it catchy and easy to remember. Its lesson is meant to encourage us and “buck us up” when circumstances are difficult. The expression is most often heard in the athletic world. However, while it may be encouraging, there is much that it leaves out.

It is easy to want to be tough during adversity. Grit is needed when we are down, but there is more to being tough than grit alone. When one says, “the tough get going,” inherent in the statement is what it takes to be tough. A team that does not engage in hard practice is not likely to overcome, no matter how much its members try to talk themselves into being tough. We see that sayings rarely tell the whole story. They have a value and a place, but they need analysis if we are to fully live by them.

Consider a saying that has been around our summer camps for decades: “God’s way works.” Easy to remember, yes, and true. But is this the whole picture—or are we missing something? What is it about God’s way that is meant? Or, to put it another way, what is the way of God we hope to instill in our Church youth? I’ll do my best to answer this question—but first let me address some history of youth programs within the Church of God.

Summer Camps Begin

A summer camp was held in Big Sandy, Texas, in 1962. My wife was one of the pioneers of that camp, which lasted for eight weeks and had no air-conditioned dormitories. Mrs. Kathryn Ames was a counselor that year. Mrs. Suzanne Pyle, who works in our Human Resources Department here in Charlotte, attended the shorter six-week camp the next year. There are, no doubt, a few others still around who remember those pioneering days. In 1965, the annual camp was moved to Orr, Minnesota, where a lakeside property had been donated to the Church.

Some congregations also began to hold informal sporting activities. My first congregation was Santa Barbara, California. The more athletic among us—and some not so athletic—would meet at the beach on Sunday mornings to play informal volleyball games, with no referees needed as we called our own net violations and other infractions. As our Ephraimite friends would say, it was a “jolly good time.”

As the number of teens and children increased in many congregations, the idea was floated to start a sports program for Church youth, and Youth Opportunities United (YOU) was established in the early 1970s. Since many schools’ extracurricular sports programs conflicted with the Sabbath, the idea was to give our teens an alternate outlet for their energies, with the hope that they would attach themselves to the Church. Basketball was the chief sport played at Ambassador College, and many young men who were sent into the field ministry had played basketball at the college, so it was logical that they would introduce a basketball program. But something was also needed for the girls, so volleyball was introduced for them.

Teams from one congregation would play teams from another, and multi-congregation tournaments soon popped up. They were often called “Family Weekends”—but they were not really for all family members, unless you enjoyed being a spectator over a long weekend. Adult teams were also introduced. There were opportunities for fellowship, and, in some areas, there were activities for smaller children, but the emphasis was on basketball and volleyball, and later on softball and track and field as well. In Canada, the big sport was hockey, and in other parts of the world activities were introduced based on local customs.

To maintain order, men were appointed over different regions. Congregations got involved in money-making projects to buy uniforms for players and cheerleaders. For the larger tournaments, professional referees were often hired. There was a lot of talk about sportsmanship, teamwork, excellence, and perseverance—and, yes, it was not uncommon to hear the phrase, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.”

The success of a program very much depended on who was overseeing the region, and cracks began to show. Good sportsmanship was not always present. Too often, even parents became emotional and tempers flared. Some teams “recruited” outside players who were willing to attend services for a short time during the sports season but were never a real part of the Church. There was also financial strain on families due to gym rentals, long-distance travel, meals away from home, and motel stays. Fatigue caused some parents to send their teens off with the team on overnight trips, where behavior occasionally became problematic. So, instead of drawing teens and congregations closer together, the opposite was too often the effect.

Nevertheless, many teens had great experiences with YOU and at camp with the Summer Education Program (SEP). The programs were very successful in giving teens experiences that most of their non-member friends never enjoyed, such as wilderness canoe trips, a cross-America bike trip from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and a New Zealand biking excursion that brought teens together from distant countries.

There were many well-run sports programs, but we must ask, *Why did so few of those teens remain with the Truth?* I was an enthusiastic supporter of the YOU and SEP programs, having been heavily involved in both. But again one must ask: *What were the fruits of these programs?* Why are so many of the thousands who attended SEP and participated in YOU not with us today? Did God's way *not* work?

The answer is not singular. The WCG apostasy took a toll on adults and children alike. Many young people, perhaps most, followed their parents back into the world. But many who had participated in YOU and SEP were, by the time of the apostasy, baptized adults who had to choose for themselves. Clearly, something had been missing from their education—and this, of course, cannot be blamed solely on either parents or on the Church's programs.

Things to Consider

The slogan "God's way works" was often the refrain of SEP, and it is used even today in some of our teen and preteen camps. But what does it really mean? Having been involved for nine years at the program in Orr, Minnesota, and for another year in Big Sandy, Texas, I can speak about the programs from considerable experience. When it came to the quality of instruction and unique opportunities for our youth, it would be hard to find better programs. Most of the staff members had been trained at Ambassador College. They gave excellent instruction, and almost all counselors were top-notch. The facilities, both at Orr and Big Sandy, were designed and constructed by the Church for its programs. When we look back at the WCG youth programs, we must honestly say that they were started with the best intentions, and that no expenses or efforts were spared in developing these programs. So, what went wrong?

"God's way works" only if it is defined clearly. To most teens, I believe the slogan simply meant that God's way was a lot of fun. And, while certain godly values were taught, there was an effort to avoid the feeling of a "Church camp" like what would be commonly seen in the world. It was agreed that SEP was not to be what some would call a "camp revival" or a place for sentimental religion.

Yes, there was a Bible Study and a Sabbath service each week, and there were Christian Living classes. But a close look at those Christian Living classes is quite revealing. Topics var-

ied over the history of the camps, but during my time at Orr, we had four classes scattered over three weeks, with titles I remember well: "Your Relationship with Rules," "Your Relationship with Money," "Your Relationship with Others," and "Your Relationship with God." Again, we did not want to have the feeling of a "Church camp." All of these were profitable topics—but was this the best use of the precious time spent at camp?

When Dr. Meredith appointed me as North American Youth Development Director in 1999, I realized that we needed to make some course corrections as we moved forward. We had to ask ourselves hard questions. We had to think through our mission and our goals.

Now, before I go further, let me point out some of the obvious. The ultimate responsibility for training children belongs to their parents. It is the Church's responsibility to *support* parents. We do this in sermons and magazines by passing along biblical and experiential wisdom to help parents. When children are temporarily turned over to our custody at camp, we therefore emphasize what should be commonly agreed-upon biblical values.

One point that I always emphasize to our staff is, "These are not our children." Parents have a reasonable expectation that we will return their children in a condition at least as well as—but preferably better than—the one they were in when they were dropped off at camp. Of course, a teen or preteen who is rebellious, or uncooperative, or simply not mature enough, is not likely to benefit from the programs at our camps. And, even aside from that, the truth is that camp is *not* for everyone. Another obvious point is that all children are different, and God must be involved in their lives during their youth. We must not leave God out of the picture, and that should go without saying.

Our Global Church of God camps struggled. Finding qualified staff was a problem from the start. In 1995, that first summer at Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri, was a learning experience. It was obvious that we needed to begin training staff at an earlier age—so, the next year, we added a high-school-staff component to the program. And we needed to have clear expectations, such as curfews that were enforced for staff as well as campers. This did not happen until after the Global disruption, when several of us made that change and many others. But, ultimately, we always emphasized with our staff that "if we cannot trust you, we have no basis on which to work with you."

Defining Behavior

For my early camp leadership experiences, which involved swimming and water polo, I had to become certified as a lifeguard and water safety instructor. One evening, during a lifeguarding class, two or three of the girls were talking when they should have been listening and paying attention. Our

instructor called them out by saying, “You are talking while I am—that is rude.”

That was a perfect example of what we refer to as *defining behavior*. It is one thing to say, “Don’t be rude,” but what does that mean in real terms to a young person—or, for that matter, to any person? Certainly, “talking while I’m talking” defines one form of rudeness.

It is the same with “God’s way works.” Unless we clearly define what we mean by “God’s way,” individuals are left to define it as they see it—and, for far too many young people who passed through SEP and YOU, “God’s way works” meant “God’s way is fun.” While it may indeed be fun, that is hardly the entire point that we intend to pass along to a younger generation.

This is why we strive, through various instructions, mechanisms, and traditions, to reinforce what we mean by “God’s way.” We instruct our youth to show outgoing concern for everyone, and one way we reinforce this instruction is through the mechanism of varying who they sit with during meals. They must stay at their assigned tables for each meal, and not get up and mix with teens at other tables. This way, they avoid sending the teens at their table the message, “You are not important to me. I’ll go talk to someone I’m more comfortable with.” When teens are allowed to sit with whomever they choose during mealtimes, cliques are unwittingly promoted, and that is why we do not let them pick and choose. Rather, we mix up seating so they spend time with many other teens over the course of the camp, whom they would not otherwise get to know.

This is only one of many mechanisms, traditions, and points of instruction that we lost for several years. Frankly, the LYP was going off the rails and needed to be set back on track. The camps were being taken in a different direction, and our mission was being cast aside.

Here is the mission statement that was formulated many years ago, at the beginning of the Living Youth Camps: *To bring teens together in a learning environment for the purpose of recapturing true values; and to further the creation of a culture of purity, honor, and respect among the youth within the Living Church of God.*

These might be nice-sounding words, but what exactly do they mean? What are the true values that we seek to recapture? What is a culture of purity? What does the word *honor* mean in this context? And how do we teach teens and pre-teens to respect one another? These words must be explained in easy-to-understand language, which we strive to do in both Staff and Camper Orientations. And our traditions and mechanisms help staff and campers put these values of God’s way of life into practice.

Defining Our Mission

A *culture* involves a group of people. We are not shy about telling campers and staff that we are trying to sell them a

better way of life. We hope that enough of them will buy into God’s way that they can create a significantly large positive peer group within the Living Church of God. They should be able to go to the Feast and find others sharing the same godly values.

We know that the prince of the power of the air is directing the course of our world. Profanity, immodesty, cruelty toward the weak, sex outside of marriage, and narcissism (*Hey, look at how cool I am!*), abound in youth culture. But the *purity* we seek is defined by the biblical principle of modesty (1 Timothy 2:9), by taking your mind off yourself and seeing how you can help others (Philippians 2:4), by reserving sex for marriage (1 Corinthians 6:9–10, 18), and by avoiding crass, profane, and inappropriate language (Colossians 3:8).

Honor in our context means an internalized code of conduct. It is what you do when no one is watching. Only the individual can choose to live a life founded upon internalized godly values, but we encourage each individual young person to choose this better way and not to drift with the wind. Our youth must prove what they believe and have the backbone to stand up for it.

And *respect* refers to how we treat others. Our young people are taught to show deference to those who are older. They must also respect one another by not putting others down. Boys need to show respect for girls by not selfishly attempting to satisfy their own desires, and girls must do the same.

Defining Our Goal

What do we expect we will gain from carrying out our mission statement? The answer is found in our goal statement: *We expect that out of this culture of purity, honor, and respect will come godly relationships that will lead to loving marriages and strong families that will provide stability and future leadership in the Living Church of God.*

Not all teens will buy what we are selling. Sadly, some will cast aside the precious pearl offered to them. However, it is our hope that through the LYP we can inspire many to find treasures hidden beneath the soil of today’s corrupt culture—and we have many fine examples of young families who are doing just that. If you haven’t noticed, we are experiencing a “baby boom” in the Church in some of our larger congregations. Young people are building their lives, and their families, on a foundation of purity, honor, and respect. They are forming godly relationships that are leading to loving marriages and a future generation of strong families.

Yes, it is true that “God’s way works,” but God’s way must be defined. Slogans can be good, but they must be more than catchphrases—they must be taught and reinforced clearly. It is then up to those we teach to buy what we are selling. (L)



History's Warning: Hold Onto Your First Love

By **Douglas S. Winnail**

One of the most sobering aspects of human existence is that important lessons of history go unheeded or are soon forgotten. As a result, mistakes of the past are repeated again and again by individuals who fail to learn from history. The story of God's Church is no exception.

What can we learn from the lessons of history that God has recorded in His word? What can we glean from the admonitions given to the Ephesian brethren? How can we avoid the mistakes of the past?

Profound Parallels

The history of the Church of God is outlined prophetically in the second and third chapters of Revelation. As we approach the end of this age, the people of God have grown more concerned about the messages recorded for the Philadelphian and Laodicean eras of the Church—and rightly so. However, it is instructive to notice some remarkable similarities between conditions in the Church at the end of the age and the circumstances that existed in the Church during the first century—the Ephesian era.

The Ephesian era encompasses the starting years of the Church established by Jesus Christ and His Apostles. Jesus' ministry began in the third decade of the first century (the late 20s), but the New Testament Church actually began in the 30s (see Acts 2). The book of Acts recounts events in the 30s, 40s, and 50s. Paul's epistles were written in the mid-50s and early 60s. These were times of rapid growth in the early Church.

The epistles of John and the book of Revelation were most likely written in the 90s. These books indicate that within 60 years of its founding by Jesus Christ and the Apostles, serious problems and divisions had already arisen in the Church. The Bible explains why these problems developed and records lessons for our admonition today. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

God called Mr. and Mrs. Herbert W. Armstrong into His Church in the late 1920s, and Mr. Armstrong started the Radio Church of God in the 1930s. The 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s were periods of rapid growth for the Church of God. However, by the early 1970s, problems and divisions were becoming readily apparent. By the 1990s, not long after Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986, serious factions had developed, and the Church had fractured and split. Within 60 years of the start of the Philadelphian era, devastating divisions had engulfed the Church—just as in the first century.

In this article, we will examine an important warning with clear application for us today, which the Eternal God inspired and recorded in His word.

A Warning to Ephesus

In Revelation 2, we find the Apostle John revealing Christ's praise for the Ephesian Christians' works of patience, labor, and perseverance for the truth of God. They are also commended for discerning true apostles from deceitful impostors (Revelation 2:2–3; see also how Peter handled the encounter with a teacher named Simon in Samaria in Acts 8:9–23).

However, the Scriptures also record a sobering admonition to the brethren of the Ephesian era. God plainly states, "Nevertheless I have this against you, *that you have left your first love*. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent" (Revelation 2:4–5).

The lesson of the Ephesian era is that its brethren *lost their original focus*. As time went on, they drifted away from their founding mission and purpose. They apparently forgot why they had been called out of the world and into the Church. As a result, they began to splinter into factions and to follow different leaders with different ideas (1 Corinthians 1:10–17).

To be able to learn important lessons from the experience of first-century Christians, we must clearly understand what they lost sight of. We must keep a clear focus on the mission and purpose that Jesus Christ outlined for the Church—a mission and purpose from which the Ephesians had drifted away.

The Great Commission

Today, many have different ideas of why the Church was founded and what it is supposed to be doing. However, Jesus Christ gave specific instructions to His first disciples. The night before He was crucified, Jesus told them, “If you love Me, *keep My commandments*” (John 14:15). Love of God is equated with following His instructions.

After His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus told His disciples to go to all nations, “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). But just what commands did Jesus give to the disciples through whom He raised up the New Testament Church? What was their focus to be? What were they commissioned to do?

Notice the beginning of Christ’s ministry. Jesus told His disciples, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). He urged them to think bigger than just about themselves, and He set an example for them to follow. Jesus was busy preaching the Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God and attending to the needs of people. “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23).

When He sent the Apostles out on their initial training mission, He commissioned them to preach this same Gospel of the Kingdom and to heal the sick (Matthew 10:7–8). Jesus also indicated that His disciples would not have finished their task before He would return (Matthew 10:23). Biblical

By the 1990s, not long after Mr. Armstrong’s death in 1986, serious factions had developed, and the Church had fractured and split. Within 60 years of the start of the Philadelphian era, **devastating divisions had engulfed the Church—just as in the first century.**

prophecy states that this Gospel of the Kingdom of God will be preached to all the world at the end of the age as a witness (Matthew 24:14). This has been the focus of Philadelphian Christians for the last 90 years and more. We have been united in that focus for roughly a *century*.

However, some in God’s Church today feel this job—of preaching the Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to the world—has been accomplished. Their focus has turned inward. Their chief or only focus is to “prepare themselves” for Christ’s return, as they neglect the importance of sharing the hope of Christ’s return with the billions who *desperately* need that return in order to see the world change for the better.

For others, their gospel has become merely a message of “good works”—which Jesus Himself said was a misunder-

standing of His original instructions (Matthew 7:21–23). They have forgotten that a vital purpose Jesus Christ gave to His Church was to warn this world of the sobering and climactic events that will precede His second coming. Entire chapters of three gospels are devoted to this theme—specifically, Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

Paul, Peter, and John emphasize the same warning, as we can see in 2 Thessalonians 2, 2 Timothy 3, 2 Peter 3, and the entire book of Revelation. Jesus repeatedly urged disciples who would be alive at the end of the age to watch world events (Matthew 24:36–44; 25:13; Mark 13:32–37). For people to remain alert and watchful, someone needs to function as a watchman, and this is the message of chapters 3 and 33 of Ezekiel. This, too, has been an important function of the Philadelphia era for roughly 90 years. It has been a mission that has held us together.

However, there are some Christians today who feel this is not their job—and even that it is no longer necessary. This is another aspect of a focus that has been lost—the “first love” that has been forgotten.

Jesus gave another vital commission to His disciples. He told them to “feed my sheep” (John 21:15–17). This involves teaching those who are called out of the world about the mission of the Church and how to live by every word of God. Christians must learn to live according to the rules that will govern every aspect of life in the coming Kingdom of God, and the Church is to be busy preparing individuals to function as the leaders—kings and priests—in God’s coming Kingdom.

Those whom God has called must come to understand the real causes of and solutions to the problems facing mankind—not just participate in Church social occasions. They must develop the capability to function as part of an effective world-ruling government under Jesus Christ, instead of resisting and resenting godly authority. They must be of the same mind, able to work together as a smoothly functioning team, instead of being preoccupied with “doing their own thing.”

Sadly, some today seem to feel that having their own minister, their own songbooks, their own building, or their own ideas being preached is sufficient evidence that the flock is being fed. Jesus Christ, however, was moved by His compassion for the plight of mankind. Scripture records that He lamented, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37). He urged His true disciples to be willing to sacrifice their personal wishes, ideas, and comforts in order to finish

the job of conveying the hope of the Gospel to a dying world (Luke 9:58–62).

Most of us understood that learning the truth of God was not just to feed ourselves. We learned that “to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48). We felt deeply that our responsibility was to be part of the Work that involved sharing the good news we had come to understand and warning this world of the coming judgment of God. This has been our historical focus.

Through the decades of the 1930s, ’40s, and ’50s, Mr. Armstrong on the radio was the only true minister most people ever knew or heard, yet many people were fed, and many grew spiritually. Today, we have many ministers, DVDs and online videos, magazines, and newsletters for feeding the flock, as well as for preaching the Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God and warning the world. To accomplish the fundamental missions of the Church and follow the instructions of Jesus Christ, decisions must be made about the allocation of resources—and not everyone would make those decisions the same way. That is where leaders and respect for leadership come in.

It is the job of those in leadership positions to keep the Church focused on the commission Jesus gave to the Church—preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom to the nations, warning the world of coming cataclysmic events, and feeding the flock. All three aspects are important—we cannot pick and choose from among the three. Divisions will arise among those who lose sight of the “big picture” and focus instead on just one aspect or another of our overall Christian mission. This is a fundamental lesson from both the Bible and history.

Zealous Beginnings

Jesus Christ, as the founder of the Church, set the initial example. He was focused on doing the Work He was given to do, as He told His disciples:

My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, “There are still four months and then comes the harvest”? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together (John 4:34–36).

Jesus told His disciples that there was plenty of work to do, to be done while there was opportunity to do it: “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). The early disciples followed their Master’s example. The Church began with a sense of unity and common purpose (Acts 2:1, 40–46). Brethren asked God for boldness and guidance as the Church

began to grow (Acts 4:29–31). Even in the face of persecution that scattered the Church, they “went everywhere preaching the word” that Jesus had given to them (Acts 8:1–4).

In the early chapters of Acts, we find Philip preaching “the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). Later, we find the Apostle Paul preaching the same Gospel of the Kingdom of God and teaching about Jesus Christ (Acts 28:23, 31). Despite persecution and threats of physical harm, the Apostles continued preaching what they had been commanded by their Master. The initial picture of the first-century Church is one of a unified, highly motivated, and sharply focused group of believers. They were excited about their calling and their commission. They enthusiastically embraced their “first love.”

Problems Arise

This ideal situation, however, did not last long. On his last visit to Ephesus (in AD 56 or 57) the Apostle Paul warned the assembled elders that “after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” and that “from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29–31). Paul had to deal with divisive factions that developed around personalities (1 Corinthians 1:10–13), including “wolves” with misleading views about what constituted the Gospel (Galatians 1:6–9), with different ideas about Jesus Christ, and even with different spirits that were influencing congregations (2 Corinthians 11:1–4). Paul clearly labeled those who promoted such divisive ideas as agents of Satan, despite their claims to be ministers of Jesus Christ. “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13–15).

Nearly every one of the epistles deals with issues that erupted to trouble and divide the early New Testament Church. False teachers and misleading doctrinal ideas seemed to pop up everywhere. Speaking of brethren, Paul warns Timothy that “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” but having “itching ears” would flock to false teachers and would “turn their ears away from the truth” to believe fables instead (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

Paul reminds Titus that a true elder must be found “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught” (Titus 1:7–9). Peter warned that false teachers would “secretly bring in destructive heresies” and would use “deceptive words” to exploit people and lead them astray (2 Peter 2:1–3). He describes these false teachers as presumptuous, self-willed despisers of those in authority (2 Peter 2:10).

Near the end of the first century, John wrote that “many deceivers have gone out into the world” (2 John 7), and he described one divisive leader, “Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence” and was actually putting true believers out of the congregation over which he presided (3 John 9–10). Jude admonished his readers to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” because certain individuals had subtly and deliberately twisted and perverted the instructions and truth that Jesus gave to the original Apostles (Jude 3).

The Gospel Jesus proclaimed, which is about the coming Kingdom of God, was narrowed to become a message about nothing more than Jesus’ person, love, and good works. Instead of being told to look forward to reigning with Christ on earth, converts were told about the glories of going to Heaven. Instead of being offered the hope of becoming part of God’s Family, they increasingly heard God described as a closed Trinity. Instead of focusing on preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, the Church was divided by arguments over the nature of God.

At the close of the first century, the picture of the Ephesian era of the Church—the Church founded by Christ and the Apostles—was of a Church increasingly divided and struggling with a growing list of false or twisted doctrines promoted by misguided teachers. It was a Church that had lost its unity, its sense of mission, and its original focus.

This is the context in which John received the admonition regarding the Ephesian era of the Church (Revelation 2:1–7). God revealed that the problems of the early first-century Church arose because brethren had lost their focus—*left their first love*. They had drifted off course. They had ceased to follow Christ’s clear example and His specific instructions. This is a sobering indictment, but it is the lesson God chose to record in Scripture about the first-century Church. The lesson is preserved in the Bible for those who “have ears to hear.”

Modern Lessons

So, what can we learn as we compare our present situation to the conditions that developed in the Ephesian era of God’s Church? How can we avoid making the same mistakes?

The most important lesson is that we must maintain the same focus that Jesus Christ emphasized through His example and His instructions to the disciples. Our goal as Philadelphian Christians must be to preach the Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to this world and to function as a watchman to warn the world of the dramatic events that will mark the imminent return of the Savior of mankind. This commission requires a coordinated team effort. It cannot be done effectively by the uncoordinated, piecemeal attempts of isolated individuals and groups. That is why Jesus Christ founded His Church.

The Ephesian era fell into trouble when brethren lost this fundamental focus—leaving their first love—as they began following individuals who pointed congregations in different directions. Such individuals must be clearly labeled as false teachers who cause divisions, no matter any “good intentions.”

For years we have emphasized the importance of examining all things and holding onto what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). In order to avoid getting caught up in reasonable-sounding yet misleading ideas, we must know what the Bible clearly teaches. This requires daily personal study of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:14–16). Christians in the early Church had to do this (Acts 17:11; Revelation 2:2). We must do the same today to avoid being led off in reasonable-sounding but wrong directions. We must remember Paul’s admonition to Titus to hold on to what we have been taught (Titus 1:9), even while critics may assert that we are stuck in the past and are unwilling to change. Here, again, it is an issue of *staying focused*.

We must also learn to think about bigger issues than our own personal needs and desires. Jesus Christ is coming back to this earth to save mankind—to establish a world-ruling government that will address and solve global problems. He needs individuals who have learned to think about more than local issues and individual concerns. We have been called to prepare to rule the world with Jesus Christ. That should be our focus—not just enjoying the social opportunities the Church provides. Future members of the God Family must be able to respect those God has put in positions of authority and work smoothly together under God’s government to accomplish our mission (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13). Personal preferences and agendas cannot be allowed to disrupt and derail the commission Jesus gave to His Church. We must stay focused on the mission that Christ commanded His disciples to accomplish.

Finally, we cannot afford to become lukewarm regarding the commission we have been given. Christ’s commandments *matter*. His instructions are not issues for debate and discussion. To entertain such an approach only fosters discord and division, leaving the focus fuzzy and blurred. People then begin drifting away. The sense of mission dissipates and the mission falters. That is what happened to the first-century Church—that is the clear lesson of both Scripture and history.

Brethren, we cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the early Church. We must remain focused. We must follow the clear example and the plain instructions of Jesus Christ. That is how we can avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. That is how we will gain the crown and the reward that God promises to give to those who are His faithful servants in these last days (Revelation 3:10–12). That is the importance of staying focused. Let us all hold onto our first love. (LW)



The Blessing of God's Tithes

By **Josh Lyons**

Many scriptures attest to how God's laws are blessings to those who know and strive to keep them. For example, Deuteronomy 10:12–13 explains that God gave His laws for our good. Loving parents give many “laws” to toddlers for their safety and well-being, such as “don't touch the stove,” “don't run into the road,” “eat your vegetables,” and “brush your teeth”—and God does the same for His children.

It should come as no surprise that one area of God's law that is very good for us involves tithing. Most of you reading this article have recently returned home after keeping the Feast of Tabernacles, an annual Festival that God not only commands, but also makes possible through His tithing laws. If you have tithed faithfully, you have experienced firsthand that “the law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul... the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:7–8).

This article will explain some of the fundamentals of tithing and remind us of how God's tithes are wonderful blessings.

Overview of Tithing

When discussing tithing, it's good to start with a common and important question, “Do Christians need to tithe under the New Covenant?”

The clearest answer to this question comes from Jesus Christ in Matthew 23:23. Let's read that in the *New Living Translation*, which renders Jesus' words in an easy-to-understand way: “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.”

Jesus stated that tithing should be carefully practiced. He also explained that some of the important pillars of God's law are justice, mercy, faith, and love of God (Luke 11:42). As do all of God's laws, His tithing laws—when obeyed properly and with a godly mindset—reveal His character. Tithing can be done *without* justice, mercy, faith, and love, as Jesus corrected

the Pharisees, but godly tithing rests upon those “weightier matters of the law.” Notably, when Jesus told the Pharisees that they were correct to tithe carefully, they were tithing based on the tithing laws in what we call the Old Testament.

Other scriptures showing that Christians should obey God's tithing laws include Genesis 14:18–20, which reveals that Abram tithed hundreds of years before Moses was born and before the Old Covenant began at Mount Sinai. The Hebrew word in verse 20 translated “tithe” is *maaser* and means *tenth part* or *the payment of a tenth part*. Jesus also explained that Christians should take heed to even the “least” of the commandments (Matthew 5:19).

So, if tithing is required of Christians, then Christians should take seriously God's following warning and promise:

“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such *blessing* that there will not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:8–10).

This important passage explains that those who do not faithfully tithe and give offerings are stealing from God and are subject to a curse. On the other hand, God promises blessings for tithing faithfully.

Before we move to the specifics of the three distinct tithes, let's touch on two practical questions.

On What Do We Tithe?

We read, “You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year” (Deuteronomy 14:22). Few in the Church today can give a tithe of grain or other products of the field, but notice that our tithes are the first-fruits of *all* our increase, not just our increase from farming: “Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the first-fruits of *all* your increase” (Proverbs 3:9).

As the *Tomorrow's World Bible Study Course* explains, regarding Deuteronomy 14:22, "We tithe on our *increase*. Increase is the result of our productive efforts, and can include both wages and investment income. For a businessman or a farmer, one's increase is one's *profit*—the total receipts minus the expenses incurred to produce those receipts" (*BSC Lesson 17, Section 2*).

Note that because we tithe only from increase from our productive efforts, the Church has recognized that income from Social Security, unemployment compensation, disability assistance, and gifts do not fall under the tithing requirement. Any donations made from those categories are offerings, not tithes.

To Whom Do We Give Our Tithes?

The Apostle Paul explained, "Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:13–14).

Tithes are now given to Jesus Christ, through His Church and its ministry. Hebrews 7 explains the relationship between the ongoing spiritual priesthood of Melchizedek—the One who became Christ—and tithing. You can read more about this in Dr. Roderick C. Meredith's booklet *God's People Tithe*.

Now, let's consider how the three distinct tithes are a blessing to both those on the receiving side and those on the giving side.

The First Tithe

This "first tithe" is given to God to support His ministry and to do His Work. "Moreover he commanded the people who dwelt in Jerusalem to contribute *support for the priests and the Levites, that they might devote themselves to the Law of the LORD*. As soon as the commandment was circulated, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of grain and wine, oil and honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything" (2 Chronicles 31:4–5).

God also describes the first tithe this way: "Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform" (Numbers 18:21). We pay this tithe each year to support God's Church and its mission. It supports our preaching the Gospel (e.g. the telecast, magazines, booklets, and other public

outreach), as well as ministers who serve the brethren in the congregations, at youth camps, and more.

Not only does this tithe touch the lives of so many who receive the message we proclaim—it touches our lives and the

Not only does this tithe touch the lives of so many who receive the message we proclaim—it touches our lives and the lives of our families who are able to have a pastor available, a shepherd whose duty is to encourage, counsel, teach, and help the brethren.

lives of our families who are able to have a pastor available, a shepherd whose duty is to encourage, counsel, teach, and help the brethren spiritually, as well as to "watch out for your

souls" (Hebrews 13:17). This tithe helps the Church provide so many sermons, articles, videos, Living Education classes, and other tools to help brethren learn and grow spiritually.

With that in mind, those on the "giving" end can appreciate what a blessing it is to give to "God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth," just like Abraham did (Genesis 14:19), to support His Work and His Church—changing real people's lives for the better.

The Second, or "Festival," Tithe

The most fundamental passage of Scripture regarding the Festival tithe tells us:

You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that *you may learn to fear the LORD your God always*. But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and *you shall rejoice*, you and your household (Deuteronomy 14:22–26).

In the September–October 2022 *Living Church News*, Mr. Wallace Smith wrote a very helpful article on the proper use of this Festival tithe, "How Do I Use My Second Tithe?" Though this tithe isn't directly mentioned in the New Testament, we see throughout Christ's ministry how He, His

parents, the Apostles, and other disciples kept God's festivals and surely obeyed God's command to save a tithe to be able to travel to His Feasts (e.g. Matthew 26:17–19; Luke 2:41–42; John 2:13, 23; 7:2–10, 37; Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Corinthians 5:8; 16:8). Keeping the Feast and rejoicing during that time cost a significant amount of money during Jesus Christ's time on earth, just as it does today.

We, as His disciples today, follow His example of traveling to the Feast of Tabernacles, so we faithfully save our Festival tithe to help us keep this and the other annual Festivals. In doing so, we “learn to fear the LORD your God always” and to “rejoice” before God with family and brethren (Deuteronomy 14:23, 26). It is easy to see how this tithe is a blessing for those who pay it—we are essentially paying ourselves with a tenth of our yearly income to use primarily in eight very special days of abundance.

Many can give generously to other brethren during the Feast of Tabernacles, and it is important to note that many of our brethren do *not* have a lot of second tithe. Some neglect their duty to save, and they should experience the consequence of that neglect, but many other brethren simply do not have much, if any, second tithe to save. So, again, let us remember what a great blessing our second tithe is. Those who have an income can be generous in giving to their brethren. Others will be on the receiving side, and they will be blessed by their brethren's generosity. God's tithing system works because it is a tangible and inspiring blessing to both those who give and those who receive.

The Third-Year Tithe

One of the Bible's major themes is that we should help others, especially those with great needs. For instance, we understand that “we should remember the poor” (Galatians 2:10). We learn that part of pure and undefiled religion is to help widows and orphans (James 1:27), and we are told to “open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land” (Deuteronomy 15:11).

One of God's tithes serves this specific purpose of helping those with significant needs. Scripture describes the third-year tithe: “At the end of *every third year* [the third and sixth years in each seven-year cycle], you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite... and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the LORD your God may *bless* you in all the work of your hand which you do” (Deuteronomy 14:28–29).

Scripture also describes a special prayer that a person should pray after giving this third tithe: “When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the *third year*... then you shall say before the LORD your God: ‘I have removed the holy tithe from my house.... I have obeyed the voice

of the LORD my God.... Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and *bless* Your people Israel and the land which You have given us” (Deuteronomy 26:12–15).

Like the other two tithes, this tithe is also a blessing from God—through it, the Church is able to offer assistance to brethren who have significant needs. This is a great blessing to help them “make ends meet.” It is important to note that this third-year tithe is *for* those with significant needs, so it naturally would not be given *by* those with such needs. Those who give the third-year tithe can learn from it the godly character traits of generosity and caring for others in love.

God's Three Tithes are Holy

God's three tithes are holy, meaning that He has set each apart for a special purpose (Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 26:13). Christians must keep those tithes holy, just as they keep God's name and His Sabbath holy. (See “God's Tithes are Holy” in the November–December 2017 *Living Church News*.)

Regarding three separate tithes, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains in a note on Deuteronomy 14:22–29, “Josephus [a Jewish historian in the first century] (Antiq. IV, 205, 240–43 [viii.8, 22]) distinguishes three tithes: one for the Levites (Num 18:20–32); the second for the Israelites to eat and enjoy in the chosen place [at the annual Festivals] (Deut 14:22–27); and the third granted every third year to the poor, the widows, and the orphans (Deut 14:28–29).” Josephus' writings are not Scripture, but this quote shows that people in the first century understood that Scripture describes three distinct tithes with distinct purposes.

In conclusion, let's review quickly what the *Tomorrow's World Bible Study Course* says in summarizing the three tithes:

Clearly, the first tithe—the firstfruits of our increase—was set aside by God for Himself and was payable to His direct representatives. Secondly, God wanted the people to worship and rejoice before Him as families on His annual occasions. He instructed them to make financial preparation to do so. Finally, God also wanted the people to share a portion of their increase with those in need. This reflects worship toward God and service toward others, a right and balanced set of priorities for all times (Lesson 17, Section 1).

God is the perfect parent, and He gives great blessings to His children. His law is one of His greatest gifts, and it includes His instructions on tithing. Each of the three holy tithes serves a special, God-ordained purpose that brings about good in the lives of those who tithe faithfully—truly, “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). (LN)

2023 Financial Audit in Review

By **D. Jerry Ruddlesden**

The Living Church of God publishes its audited financial statements each year. The complete *Living Church of God (International), Inc. and Affiliates Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Schedules* can be found at the bottom of the LCG.org/about-us page. Our 2023 audit was performed by McCannon, Rogers, Driscoll, & Associates, L.L.P. Once again, we received an “unqualified” opinion. What this means is that we received a report with no “qualifications”—that is, no objections or hesitations. Here is what the Report of Independent Auditor stated: “In our opinion, the consolidated financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Church as of December 31, 2023, and the changes in net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.”

One other item of note is that we switched Auditors for the 2023 audit. In our zeal to be good stewards, we had been noticing a sharp increase in audit fees over the past three years and decided to go through the process of bidding out our audit to reduce the fees. Though it meant that the first year would be more work for our staff as the new auditors got to know us, the 33 percent reduction in fees was worth the effort.

An International Work

The Work in the United States produces the majority of telecasts, booklets, sermons, and other materials, but we also rely on the regional offices and their dedicated staff and volunteers for help in areas where they have particular resources and strengths. Although most regions broadcast the *Tomorrow's World* telecast produced in the United States, the regional offices are often the ones that not only sponsor

the cost of airing the telecast, but also take care of literature fulfillment. This is often quite complicated due to broadcast format requirements, mailing issues, delivery, and even moving material through the customs process at the border for each country.

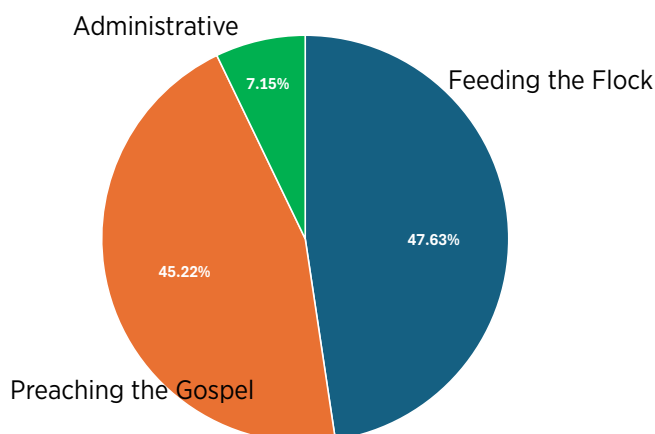
The total income in the U.S. for 2023 was \$23,813,872. This represents a 5.89 percent increase in Regular offerings, though the overall increase was 1 percent due to the timing of estate and other income amounts. The breakdown of our 2023 expenses into our three main programs include \$12,215,814 or 45.22 percent of expenses toward Preaching the Gospel, \$12,867,038 or 47.63 percent of expenses toward Feeding the Flock, and \$1,929,852 or 7.15 percent of expenses toward Administration.

One of the factors for future growth is the number of our donors and co-workers. These important contributors are those who respond to the Church's efforts on all our various media but do not yet identify as members or prospective members. 2023 saw growth in donors and coworkers. Donors increased 2.19 percent and coworkers increased 3.41 percent. Not only are we seeing growth in the number of donors and coworkers, but these contributors make up a full 15.7 percent of our total income.

We pray regularly that God will guide the Church's leadership to choose the best paths for the media effort and will bless the Church with the resources to take the Work forward powerfully. Thankfully, we see again and again that our collective efforts do bear fruit. We hear of new people being called and baptized around the world, and lost sheep are returning to us on a regular basis. Yes, we are a small work, but we are also an effective work that moves forward on its knees. As the world continues down its dark path, it desperately needs the message we preach—a message both of warning and of hope, revealing what will happen to modern Israel and to the whole world before the glorious return of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God to carry out His plan for all of mankind.

As we consider our international and domestic work for 2023, God's people can take comfort that we are an integrated work that spans the earth. Please pray that God continually shows us how He wants us to use the media opportunities we are given until Christ returns. We are all striving to fulfill the words of the Apostle Paul, who expressed his hope that, “speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:15–16). (LW)

Use of LCG Funds



A group of people, including children and adults, are sitting in green canoes on a large body of water. They are wearing life jackets and appear to be enjoying a canoeing activity. The background shows a line of trees under a blue sky with light clouds.

Living Youth Camp 2024

By **Jonathan McNair**

What is it like to be a teen at Living Youth Camp? If you talk to campers, you'll get a variety of answers. Many will talk about the friends they made. Others will tell you about their counselors, or perhaps how hot it was in the east Texas sun. But the one thing that gets every camper's attention is the activities! The activities form the framework of each day at camp, keeping campers busy and engaged.

But what activities do we provide? And why are those activities chosen out of all the possible things to do?

First Things First

While our teens come to camp expecting to enjoy plenty of fun and games, they also know that each day will begin with the Bible. On each of the ten days of camp, they hear from a different minister, encouraging them to keep up the good work of doing what their parents are teaching them at home.

Each year, we set a different theme to focus the presentations. This year, the theme was "Be Ready with an Answer," from 1 Peter 3:15 (*King James Version*). Mr. Weston began these Christian Living classes on the first day of camp, as he spoke about doing things decently and in order, without hurting others, and by putting "first things first." He was followed by a different minister each following day. For example, Mr. Josh Lyons gave a presentation titled, "Why Do We Keep the Sabbath?" Mr. Brent Mitchell titled his presentation "Wise as Serpents and Harmless as Doves." Campers were also introduced to Mr. Lawdi Ferreira, from South Africa. His topic was "Faith in Action—Why We Follow God's Commandments."

By focusing on God and His word first, we establish the right priority—not only for camp, but for our lives.

A Variety of Sports

After Christian Living, all the dorms navigate to different points in and around the Lone Star Camp to begin their scheduled activities. What activities do they enjoy?

This year, Mr. Lyons headed the gym sports. These included volleyball and basketball, and each dorm had three sessions of each over the course of camp. Campers could also

select volleyball or basketball as one of their "evening activities," which gave each camper time to learn more about these two popular games and improve their skills. Those with little or no experience had a chance to learn the basics, while those with more skill could improve. The goal was to provide a positive experience for each camper, helping them gain competence and confidence.

The aquatics department was led by Mr. Michael Elliot. He and his staff worked with the campers to learn water safety, as well as different swimming strokes. The great thing about going to an aquatics activity is that it is in the pool—in the Texas heat, that water feels great!

One of the positive attributes of the camp experience is that there are a variety of activities for campers. Archery is very different from basketball, for example, and archery this year was once again headed up by Mr. Garrett Steagall. Sometimes, campers who are not as expert at a gym sport may show a great deal of skill at a sport like archery—and archery can be enjoyed by people of all sizes and ages!

Canoeing is another activity that stretches many campers' comfort zone. Under the leadership of Mr. Mitchell, the canoeing staff taught teens how to paddle a canoe safely. They also learned what to do if their canoe "swamps" or tips over—and the canoe staff made sure it did! Campers practice the skill of calmly and safely righting their canoe, then climbing back into it.

Mr. Ben Graham led the softball activity, teaching the skill of throwing, catching, and hitting a softball. This year, setting up for softball was a challenge after the camp experienced torrential rain early.

But our activities don't just focus on sports.

Beyond Athletics

One of the most popular activities at camp is the dance class. Campers enjoy three periods of dance instruction. Each period pairs different boys and girls dorms, so campers learn to be gracious and friendly to different dance partners. Mr. Michael Thomas, with his wife, Michelle, assisting him, trained the campers to practice different dance steps, with the boys escorting the girls on and off the dance floor in a gentlemanly way.

This skill was practiced further during the "Tabletopics and Dance" activity during the second week of camp. At this

event, a boys and girls dorm together enjoy a tabletops session, complete with dessert and a short dance. The girls dorm works to prepare the decorations, learning what it takes to create a beautiful atmosphere for the occasion.

Another activity that doesn't require athletic skill is our life roles program. This year, Mr. Julian Braddock taught the young men basic plumbing skills, with an intriguing challenge to design and construct a sprinkler with different types of pipes. Led by Mrs. Carol Weston, our young ladies had the opportunity to create custom jewelry, showing amazing creativity and style.

As you can see, our campers experience a wide variety of activities, designed to challenge them to reinforce what they know and stretch themselves to try to succeed at skills that are new to them.

The final two classes that comprise our program are communications and the SEP or "Scriptural Education Program." The communications class, taught by Mr. Lenny Bower, was focused on improving the campers' ability to express themselves in a group setting. Mr. James Populo taught the SEP, reviewing the "fruits of the spirit" and digging into the biblical passages that bring this concept to life.

Behind the Scenes

To the casual observer, camp is all about the activities. And activities that are organized, well-run, fun, and even challenging for campers are *extremely* important.

But none of the fun would happen if it weren't for our service departments. The kitchen, led by Mr. Chet Carpenter, assisted by his wife, Amber, served hundreds of meals over the course of camp. The kitchen and dishwashing staff worked tirelessly to ensure that all staff and campers had good meals in a clean environment.

Our laundry staff was led by Mrs. Heather Gunn, providing one of the most basic necessities of camp—clean clothes!



And our logistics staff, overseen by department head Mr. Brandon Fall, fulfilled a seemingly innumerable multitude of tasks to ensure that the program ran smoothly. His team supplied water to the different activities, performed custodial duties, organized our storage facility, and provided set-up help—along with accomplishing a long list of other jobs. Dr. Therese Malcolm served as our advising physician, while Cheryl McIver ran First Aid, ensuring that medical needs were promptly met. Christy McNair (my wife) managed the office, keeping the business and communication functions running smoothly. Our mini-camp program was led by Mrs. Autumn Steagall, allowing some of our staff the opportunity to serve while their children were cared for.

Counselors

One last vital group of behind-the-scenes servants consists of the counselors. Our counselors—in both leading and assisting roles—provide the daily guidance and encouragement to our campers that is so crucial for a good camp experience. They work hand-in-glove with the different activity leaders, as well as the service departments and administrative staff. We could easily say, "Without the counselors, camp would not happen."

But reality is that camp wouldn't happen without *all* the different capacities in which people serve. A successful camp is a team effort made possible by every person who volunteers to serve for those two weeks. And camp succeeds because these people know why they are there! They understand that their priority is to help create an environment that teaches, reinforces, and promotes a godly way of life. The activities, the fellowship time, the time together as dorms, the time eating in the dining hall—all are framed by people intent on helping to strengthen our younger brothers and sisters in Christ, so they can become pillars of God's Church in the years to come. (L)







Adventure Camp 2024: The Eagle Cap Wilderness

By **Jonathan Bueno**

Adventure Camp will not be soon forgotten by the 34 hikers who journeyed into the stunning Eagle Cap Wilderness of Northeastern Oregon this year, and it will no doubt prove the trip of a lifetime for some. Just the drive to basecamp in Joseph, Oregon, was a feast for the eyes of those who had never seen the dense evergreen forests of the Pacific Northwest.

Upon arriving at Wallowa Lake State Park on Sunday morning, everyone set up camp and prepared for orientation in the afternoon. Orientation included an overview description of the trail, wilderness safety, and other technical aspects of the hike. Orientation was also a good opportunity to explain the “why” of Adventure Camp, which includes practicing God’s way of life in an unfamiliar environment, getting away from screens and out into the creation, learning new skills, and overcoming worthwhile challenges. Camping by the beautiful blue lake, with granite mountain peaks soaring above, generated excitement and anticipation for the next day’s hike. We were not let down—though Sunday’s vista proved to be the only view we didn’t have to work for on the trip.

A Journey of a Lifetime

The next morning, we split up into three hiking groups and departed for the Hurricane Creek trailhead. This was a change from the original itinerary because unusually cool spring weather had left snow in some places on our planned route. The first day of hiking proved to be by far the most challenging. All groups, departing 30 minutes apart, hiked roughly ten miles and gained more than 3,000 feet of altitude. Melting snow created many waterfalls that cascaded down the mountains, as well as three streams that hikers had to wade across barefoot. We also seemed to have discovered where about half the mosquitoes in the state of Oregon reside. They were happy to greet us, though thankfully the mosquito cloud seemed to mostly dissipate once we had hiked above the snowline. Those in our courageous first group were absolute champions for being able to stay on the trail once we hit the snowline, as the mountain-goat instincts of one of our Montana staff members came in handy. The tracks the first group laid down helped guide the two trailing groups. While this day was the hardest, it was also

perhaps one of the most scenic. All groups camped above the snowline at well over 7,000 feet, which gave us a spectacular view of the night sky.

The second day of hiking took us through the Lake Basins area of the wilderness, a series of alpine lakes nestled amidst the surrounding granite mountain peaks of greyish white and red, where the groups stopped to enjoy the scenery for a little while. This beautiful area is one reason why people from all over the Northwest come to the Eagle Cap Wilderness. This day was mostly—and thankfully—downhill as groups put in seven to nine miles to reach their respective camping spots near Six Mile Meadow. A few more stream crossings awaited us near the bottom of the valley as we descended. One major benefit of this wilderness area is that it offers dispersed camping—hikers can camp anywhere they want, though there are suggested camping spots. Once each group found a camping spot each evening, everyone worked together to set up camp, filter water, start a fire, cook dinner, and properly store food.

On the third hiking day, each group set out on day hikes offering recreation opportunities, such as being able to plunge into an ice-cold river. Some went up a switchback trail heading nearly straight up the mountain we were camped beneath. One group, making it to the top of Polaris Pass at 8,890 feet, saw the mountain valleys in both directions. Besides the breathtaking views this day provided, one highlight was being able to spot a herd of shaggy white mountain goats grazing not too far away.

On the last day of the hike, the groups departed early and headed down the West Fork of the Wallowa River Loop Trail. Hikers made it out by around lunchtime and were greeted with food prepared by the hardworking basecamp staff, who proved essential on the first and last day of camp by preparing meals and helping distribute and collect equipment.

After emerging from days of wilderness isolation, most headed into the small tourist town of Joseph for some sightseeing and shopping. The last night was spent at ABC Mountain Retreat, near the town of Weston. After turning in equipment, everyone enjoyed a spaghetti dinner and fellowship before hearing a wrap-up message. S’mores around a campfire were the perfect way to finish the day. Everyone enjoyed sleeping in comfy beds on the final night, before saying goodbyes and departing early in the morning. It was an unforgettable trip, especially for those who had never backpacked before. (LN)



International Camp Reports

Kenya LYP Camp December 2023

The Living Youth Camp in Kenya 2023 was held from December 24 to 30, with 154 campers and around ten volunteer staff members. Campers from twelve different congregations across Kenya came together at the Church property in Kendu Bay, Western Kenya. Each day began with an early morning jog and camp clean-up, followed by a hearty breakfast. The mornings continued with singing and spiritual messages focusing on this year's camp theme, "Choose Life." Both campers and staff enjoyed the various activities, as well as many encouraging and motivating messages throughout the week.

A standout activity was a cooking competition that rallied teams of campers together to prepare Kenyan foods according to the traditional method of cooking over an open fire. Each team made *chapatis* (a flatbread), popcorn, and even a delicious cake!

Campers took part in games, a nature hike to Lake Victoria, and a bus trip to a nearby waterfall and reservoir. One clear highlight was the sports day held at a nearby school, where the campers enjoyed a walking race, volleyball, football (soccer), and other field sports. Even the spectators had a wonderful time, providing music and encouragement for the participants.

Another notable event was the Spokesman Club, which campers either participated in or observed. Young men had the opportunity to hone their public-speaking skills, while the audience learned what Spokesman Club is all about. There was also lots of singing. Campers from each congregation had memorized and practiced two new hymns from the Church hymnal before attending camp. At camp, they sang those hymns throughout the week—and, on the final day, a panel of adjudicators provided feedback and encouragement.

Camp concluded on the Sabbath after services, but there was still one more momentous event on Sunday morning. After a brief hike to a nearby river, eight young people were baptized. Everyone traveled home physically tired but spiritually energized, eagerly anticipating next year's camp.

—Dinah Winnail



LYP Camp 2023 in Benin

At the end of last year, 35 enthusiastic campers participated in the LYP Teen Camp in Porto-Novo, Benin. A total of 44 attendees, including staff and family members, gathered on Sunday, December 24, coming from Benin, Togo, Nigeria, and Belgium. Campers spoke seven different languages, with French serving as the common language used in all activities.

Camp started off with an energetic game of Molky, a popular throwing game, followed by orientation, dinner, and quiet time. The first day came to a close with the group singing our favorite camp song, "By This Shall All Men Know."

As with other camps, we followed the theme set by Mr. Weston and Mr. Nathan: "Choose Life." Our days began early, which allowed us the unique opportunity to share some classes live online with our sister camps in South Africa and Kenya. The focus and determination to excel were evident across all activities, especially swimming: Hermann Loko Aikpe, an experienced secondary school teacher, encouraged some teens who could not yet swim, and they steadily gained confidence as they learned the breaststroke. The nature class left everyone amazed at the wonders of the animal kingdom.

The campers displayed great enthusiasm and engagement in all the classes, actively participating in discussions about the music we listen to, the clothes we wear, and the attitudes we need to adopt as we make responsible, godly choices in life. Everyone clearly valued the privilege of attending camp this year!

—Rees and Fanny Ellis



LYP Teen and Preteen Camp in South Africa 2023

The Living Youth Teen and Preteen Camp in South Africa kicked off at the end of December 2023 with vibrant energy, welcoming 70 enthusiastic campers and staff from South Africa, Zambia, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Benin, and the UK.

This year’s camp theme, “Choose Life,” was the focus of our daily Christian Living classes, where we explored this profound topic in depth. The classes were presented by Mr. Peter Nathan, Mr. Lawdi Ferreira, Mr. Ryan van der Watt, Dr. Scott Winnail, and Mr. Gerald Weston, who joined us online, and these sessions were a highlight for everyone.

To challenge the campers and help them develop new skills, we introduced several new activities to the schedule, including handball and basic bricklaying skills, tailored specifically for the boys. These fresh additions complemented longtime camp favorites such as netball, volleyball, swimming, dance, tag rugby, soccer, a formal dinner-dance, etiquette class, water polo, life-skills classes, arts and crafts, obstacle courses, and horseback riding, as well as leadership and team-building games.

One of the most anticipated parts of each day was Evening Reflections, where campers and staff gathered to share their personal highlights and lessons learned. These reflections fostered a deep sense of unity and love among everyone present.

Staff members noted how the camp experience exceeded their expectations, commenting on the seamless teamwork and the extra efforts made to ensure everyone felt at home. Beyond the activities, camp serves a greater purpose—nurturing relationships among young people while deepening their personal connection with God. Reflecting on his own experience as a camper decades ago, one adult highlighted the profound impact that Christian Living classes had on his spiritual foundation, emphasizing the lasting influence these experiences have on campers.

We are deeply grateful for God’s protection and blessings, which made yet another camp a resounding success!

—Lawdi Ferreira



Births

Henry Alexander de Jager was born on August 17 to Mr. and Mrs. Lou (Alexandra) de Jager of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation. Henry weighed eight pounds, ten ounces, and was 20 inches “tall.” Mother and baby are doing great.

Ordinations

Mr. Alvin Vanhoozer was ordained a deacon on Pentecost by Pastor Lenny Bower and elder Jeff Foster. Mr. Vanhoozer serves in the Wytheville, Virginia, congregation.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. Benjamin Denny and Ms. Michaela Valencia were united in marriage on June 20. Dr. Jeffrey Fall officiated at the outdoor ceremony held by the beautiful banks of the North Fork American River in California. The couple met at Living Youth Camp in 2021. Mr. and Mrs. Ben Denny will live in North Carolina and attend the Charlotte congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin (Jan) Fannin of Knoxville, Tennessee, recently celebrated their **65th wedding anniversary**. They were married on August 1, 1959, and are longtime, faithful

members of God’s Church. With his wife by his side, Mr. Fannin has served as a pastor in God’s Church for many years. They have been blessed with two children, two grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren, all of whom attend Living Church of God congregations. In addition to family celebrations, the Knoxville congregation honored Mr. and Mrs. Fannin with an anniversary cake and flowers after services on August 10.

Mr. and Mrs. Dale (Darlene) Fulps celebrated their **60th anniversary** on June 13. Mr. and Mrs. Fulps have been a

wonderful example of dedication to each other and to the Church. The Rawlins, Wyoming, congregation celebrated with them with an anniversary cake. Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Fulps!

Mr. Mark Loudermilk and Ms. Alyssa Sauter were united in marriage on Sunday, September 15, by Pastor Yancy Taber. Family and friends witnessed the making of this special covenant created by God and celebrated the occasion with a reception afterwards. Mr. and Mrs. Mark Loudermilk attend the Terre Haute, Indiana, congregation.

In Loving Memory

Mr. Mark Arnaldo, 67, died on July 9 after a brief illness. Born and raised in Massachusetts, he moved to the beautiful rock of Newfoundland in Canada after marrying his beloved wife, Rosalyn. Mr. Arnaldo had a love for computers and technology, which he shared with his son Liam, who is now following in his father’s footsteps. He had a strong faith in God and was a member of the Springdale congregation in Newfoundland. He will be greatly missed by his family, the brethren, and all who knew him.

Mr. Edward Seth Burns, 71, died peacefully in hospital on August 18. He was baptized in 1983, and he had to change jobs three times in order to observe God’s Sabbath. He had a passion for history, classical music, opera, and gastronomy, and he also learned German. Mr. Burns was a member of the Quebec City congregation in Canada.

Mr. Sam Hendry, 88, died on June 16. Health problems prevented his regular attendance at services during his last few

years, but he came with a big smile whenever he was able, and it was a joy to see him. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him, including the Halifax, Nova Scotia, congregation in Canada.

Mrs. Margaret Hill, 87, died on August 2. She came in contact with God’s truth through Radio Luxembourg in 1953 and requested *The Plain Truth* magazine. Her husband, Gordon, first read the magazine secretly, then began attending services with her, and they were baptized together in 1963. Mr. Hill predeceased Mrs. Hill in 2019. They were members of the Sevenoaks congregation in England.

Mrs. Joan Jennings, 88, died peacefully in her sleep Sabbath morning, August 3. She was a longtime member, baptized along with her husband, Stan, in November 1962. Mr. Jennings predeceased her in 2022. Mrs. Jennings was a member of the Hook, England, congregation, and will be dearly missed by all who knew her.

Ms. Suzanne Johnson, 68, died September 18, one day short of turning 69. She was a member of the St. Joseph, Missouri, congregation and a longtime member of God's Church, baptized in 1979. Ms. Johnson will be missed by her family, the brethren, and other friends.

Mrs. Elizabeth Jokela, 79, died on June 24. She was a member of the Trenton, Nova Scotia, congregation and a longtime member of God's Church. She and her husband, Robert, were baptized together in 1969 and had been happily married for more than 56 years when he predeceased her in 2020. Mrs. Jokela was a loving and gentle lady who loved God and her Church family. Though not able to attend services for health reasons, she appreciated the kindness of the brethren who were always there to help her when needed. Mrs. Jokela is survived by their three sons and their wives, as well as several grandchildren. She will be missed by all who knew her.

Mrs. Rhonda Marley, 82, was born February 21, 1942, in Nebraska and died August 15, in Moody, Texas. She was baptized into God's Church on February 20, 1965, and attended the Temple, Texas, congregation with her husband until failing health kept her home. Her husband of 32 years, Mr. John Marley, survives her.

Mrs. Cathy McKinney, 75, finished her race and died peacefully on May 3. She was baptized in 1976 and remained faithfully dedicated to God for the rest of her life. Mrs. McKinney had a childlike curiosity about the world around her and will be remembered for her love for God, her husband, her family, and her brethren. She impacted many lives in a positive way and was very active in the Cheyenne, Wyoming, congregation. Her family, the congregation, and her friends will certainly miss her.

Mrs. Elizabeth Scott Morrison, 85, died peacefully on July 18 at her home in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, surrounded by her family. "Miss Liz" is survived by her five children—Brenda, Isaac, Isaiah, Diane, and Kenneth—as well as seven grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her beloved husband of 58 years, Isaiah Morrison, Sr. Mrs. Morrison was a faithful member in God's Church since February 13, 1960, and a wonderful

example of God's way to all who knew her. She will be missed and affectionally remembered by all.

Mrs. Maxine Nork, 86, died peacefully in her sleep July 7. She is survived by her husband of 66 years, Mr. Jim Nork, a longtime elder in God's Church, and their three children. Mr. and Mrs. Nork were baptized in March 1963 and were members of the Phoenix, Arizona, congregation for many years before moving to Texas, where they have attended the Temple congregation.

Mr. Paul Corwen "Corky" Parker, 61, died peacefully at home and holding his beloved wife's hand on March 26. After his baptism in August 2012, he became a fixture in the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation, serving as an usher until he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's at the age of 55. Mr. Parker was very much a family man and dearly loved his two daughters. He was well-loved in the community and highly regarded by the veterans with whom he served as a young man prior to being called into the truth and God's Church. His brethren recognized his warmth and outgoing nature, and he will be missed. He is survived by his loving wife of 36 years, Angela Griffin Parker, as well as their two daughters, his stepmother, one sister, and three grandchildren.

Mr. Norman Reid, 83, died on June 24. He was a faithful member of God's Church for more than 50 years—baptized in 1968—and attended the Belfast congregation in Northern Ireland. His funeral was held on July 3 in Scotland, where he was buried next to his wife, Doris, who predeceased him.

Mr. Samuel L. Shrader, 77, died on August 10 at his home. Baptized in 1984, he was a longtime, faithful member of God's Church and served as a deacon for the past 15 years. He is survived by his wife, Sue Shrader, as well as children and extended family. Mr. Shrader will be fondly remembered for his calming demeanor and his many years serving at the West Virginia Preteen Camp, particularly teaching guitar to many young campers. Mr. Shrader's funeral was conducted by his pastor, Mr. Lenny Bower, with both his physical and Church family in attendance.

Editor's Note: *One of this issue's obituaries was incomplete when printed in a previous issue and is complete here. Our thanks to the family of the deceased for their graciousness and patience.*

Electronic Service Requested

Don't Look Down Upon the Small Things

An interesting statement found in the Old Testament writings of the prophets warns us against looking down upon “the day of small things” (Zechariah 4:10). It is natural for people to be impressed by relatively big things and to disregard the small. Yet small things may sometimes become great. Many examples illustrate this truism—that great things often have humble beginnings.

You may have heard the saying, *Tall oak trees from little acorns grow*. Indeed, a small seed can grow into a giant tree. We should learn an important lesson from this example alone.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ compared the Kingdom of God to a minuscule mustard seed (1 to 2 millimeters in diameter) that grows large enough for birds to nest in its branches (Luke 13:18–19). Some mustard bushes can grow 30 feet high—not bad for such a tiny seed! Jesus encouraged His disciples to have faith comparable to a tiny mustard seed, by which faith one could successfully command a mulberry tree to be pulled up and planted in the sea (Luke 17:6).

Regarding small things, Christ taught the Parable of the Minas, in which a king went to a far country to receive a kingdom and gave each of his servants a mina to invest while he was away. “Then came the first, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned ten minas.’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’ And the second came, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned five minas.’ Likewise he said to him, ‘You also be over five cities’” (Luke 19:16–19).

That’s quite a good return on an investment of simply being faithful “in a very little.” We know of multi-million- and

even billion-dollar companies that began humbly in someone’s garage or basement. Small beginnings can develop into successful enterprises.

Cyrus, ruler of Medo-Persia, which conquered Babylon in 539 BC, released the Jewish exiles to return to rebuild Jerusalem and God’s temple. It was a daunting task, beset by enemies who opposed the project and plagued by the discouragement of those who had seen the glory of Solomon’s original temple, with which the new effort compared unfavorably. But, by God’s will, the great undertaking was accomplished.

Consider, too, the tiny human egg cell, with its diameter of about 0.12 millimeters. Each of us came from one such single cell, which after fertilization multiplied many times until we were born. This is a humble beginning and a marvelous one, through which we became autonomous human beings.

And once there were only two human beings: Adam and Eve. But look at the world’s population today! And that’s after a global flood that left just eight people saved in Noah’s ark, followed by millennia of plagues, wars, and disasters.

Another tiny seed—the Church of God founded by Jesus Christ, His “little flock” (Luke 12:32)—will fill the earth when Christ returns as conquering King. He will restore the devastated planet, bringing salvation to all nations of the earth. Scripture describes the glorious restoration Christ will bring: “A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation” (Isaiah 60:22). Isaiah also said, “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:7).

So, never look down upon the small things. They may become great.

—Roger Meyer