

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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Walk as Children of Light

Dear Brethren,

Over the last century, there has been a dramatic change in how people dress for various occasions. I still remember my mother telling me that women prior to World War II did not go downtown without dressing up—hat, gloves, dress, and even jewelry. Pictures from that era show that men commonly dressed up as well—a suit, tie, hats, and dress shoes. That seems so strange to us today.

Whenever I fly out of Charlotte, I wear a pair of shoes needing to be shined, because I have gratefully observed that the Charlotte airport seems to have the best shoe-shiners found at any airport in the United States. A shoeshine is a waste of money at most airports, which is why you almost never see a line of men or women waiting to get a shine—but not so in Charlotte. There will often be three or four people working while one or two customers are lined up to wait, eager to give their shoes a 15-minute treatment and a new look.

Even so, when you sit in the shoe-shiner's chair and watch the hundreds passing by, you see only a small minority with dress shoes—and that's okay. Comfortable walking shoes may even be preferable, considering the distances one must walk in some airports and the hassle of going through security. But it is easy to see that modern society has become very casual, which brings both pros and cons. Most of us would likely be uncomfortable with the dress-up attire of the 1700s. Real men today would not wear long curly wigs and ruffled shirts, and I am sure my wife would not like to wear the wide-bodied dresses that would have prevented women from fitting through a modern doorway.

Of course, I am only addressing attire in the Western world. Other countries have their own customs of *casual* and

dressy. Some customs may be the same today as a thousand years ago, while others may have evolved over time, as have ours. When my wife and I attended the 1981 Feast of Tabernacles in Bermuda, we saw men conducting services while wearing shorts—Bermuda shorts, of course! These were not the shorts seen on the beaches, and the men wore them with sport coats and ties, calf-length dress socks, and dress shoes. This was (and may still be) dress-up attire in Bermuda. How we dress ourselves is to a great degree a product of culture, but even within a culture there are different ideas as to what is “dressed up” and what is not.

A Sobering Parable

Jesus began a parable about the Kingdom this way: “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding” (Matthew 22:2–3). He went on to explain that many who were called to the dinner were too busy to be bothered, “and they were not willing to come” (v. 3). Each invitee had an excuse and did not value what the invitation meant (vv. 5–10). Then we come to the sobering conclusion:

But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen (vv. 11–14).

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We can draw several points from this. The parable's primary message involves righteous behavior, as is also depicted in the book of Revelation: "And to her [the Bride of Christ] it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (19:8). But it also drives home the point that there was protocol regarding how one should dress for a wedding—and surely for other special occasions as well.

How that special attire differed from other attire, I do not know. I have never heard an explanation of the exact difference—and, to be plain about it, I have not bothered to research this detail. But the point is clear that there *were* differences. The point Jesus was making is abundantly clear to anyone willing to understand—how we dress spiritually is of vital importance for eternal life, but our outward attire is also important.

There are some finer points to the parable. The improperly dressed man is called "Friend." There is no animosity, just a recognition that he came disrespectfully to the occasion. And the man was speechless upon being cast out—shocked that his attire mattered. We should also note that he will bear terrible regrets for the error of not taking his calling seriously enough.

Modesty Matters

Peter addressed the dispersion in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) regarding the need to dress modestly (1 Peter 3:3–5). And Paul instructed Timothy to admonish women in a similar fashion. "In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works" (1 Timothy 2:9–10).

We see here that our good works accompany our outward appearance. We also understand from the wider biblical context that there is no prohibition wearing a moderate amount of jewelry. It is our *focus* that is important. God is more interested in our inner beauty than in our physical appearance, and He does not respect self-focused attempts to attract attention by visually standing out from the crowd.

Modesty also involves restraint in displaying parts of one's anatomy. Much beach attire is scandalous today. If you have seen news reports describing Spring Break, or accounts of the ways in which many young women dress on the beaches of Florida (or elsewhere), you understand what I am saying. And modesty does not apply only to women. God instructed those men offering sacrifices, "Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it" (Exodus 20:26). God's mind on this matters.

Indeed, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him" (Psalm 89:7). We are instructed that "as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, *'be holy, for I am holy'*" (1 Peter 1:15–16).

But what concerns me more than how we may sometimes fall short of proper attire is the lack of seriousness with which many people receive these admonitions. Too often, their response is returned in words or actions saying, *No one is going to tell me how to dress. I'll dress any way I please.* Friends, we need to understand that this is a frame of mind that goes beyond outward appearance and can find us thrown "into outer darkness."

Will we walk self-willed, "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience," or will we "walk as children of light" (Ephesians 2:2; 5:8)?

God's Church has consistently taught that we are not to go to either extreme—neither narcissistically focusing on our outward appearance, nor looking as if we do not care about how we present ourselves. Sabbath services and the annual Feasts are times to dress up before God. And modesty is a godly admonition—whether for services or for spending time at the beach or swimming pool.

Dr. Roderick C. Meredith often reminded us that the Bible reveals the mind of God. How we display our bodies and present ourselves is a matter of showing respect for the One who created us. What message do you send to others?



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“By This Shall All Men Know”

Jesus and His servants had left Judea and were traveling through Samaria on their way back to Galilee. Around noon, in the heat of the day, while His disciples went into the nearby town to buy food, Jesus sat by the well Jacob had dug centuries earlier. It was then that a Samaritan woman came to get some water. Jesus asked her to draw some water for Him, which led to an enlightening conversation revealing powerful lessons for us today.

Who was this woman? We read of God using Assyrian king Shalmaneser to defeat and exile the Israelites who made up the northern ten tribes—the house of Israel. Shalmaneser brought “people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities” (2 Kings 17:24). These are the ancestors of the Samaritans found in the New Testament, including the woman Jesus spoke to at the well.

The Samaritans saw themselves as the spiritual children of the patriarch Jacob, if not literally his children. Notice the woman’s question: “Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?” (John 4:12).

A Different Spirit

Correcting the Corinthian brethren, Paul listed three errors: accepting those who came preaching *another Jesus*, receiving *a different spirit*, and tolerating *a different gospel* (2 Corinthians 11:4). But he did not elaborate on these errors, stating only that those who promote them are ministers of Satan. Today, we easily see that modern mainstream “Christianity” preaches a very different Jesus—and that the message He proclaimed has been replaced by a different one exclusively about His person. But what about *a different spirit*? We generally expound upon the first and last of the three errors, but we rarely talk about this middle one. This brings us back to Jesus’ conversation at the well.

The Samaritan woman confidently placed her relationship with God in her people’s perceived—or contrived—heritage. She also felt assured that the Samaritans worshiped at the right location—much as the Jews, in like manner, placed their confidence in Jerusalem. “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews

say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship” (John 4:20). Furthermore, she put confidence in the Samaritans’ syncretistic doctrines (see 2 Kings 17:33–34). After hearing her, Jesus set the record straight that she had no idea what the Samaritans were worshiping, and He explained that salvation was of the Jews. He also set the record straight about location. “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father” (John 4:21).

It is human nature to hold confidence in heritage, doctrines, and location while missing the big picture. Not only were the Samaritans in error—so were the Jews in placing too much confidence in the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. The Jews also showed confidence in their heritage when proclaiming Moses as their spiritual father. Jesus told them, “Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, *in whom you trust*” (John 5:45). Moses is truly a giant figure in the biblical narrative, but the Jews missed the big picture of who was *behind* Moses.

Notice their boast in Moses when seeking a sign from Jesus: “Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, *‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’*” (John 6:31). But Jesus reminded them of what should have been obvious—that it was not Moses who saved the children of Israel, but the Rock, who followed Israel in the wilderness, who gave them manna. Further, it was God the Father—not Moses—who was giving them Christ as the true source of life. “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world’” (vv. 32–33). The Jews also placed their confidence in many humanly devised doctrines (Mark 7:6–9). It is sad that, even today, some who consider themselves Christians are still drawn to various Jewish rituals that Christ condemned.

We see that both the Jews and the Samaritans of Jesus’ day looked to heritage, location, and doctrine as their ways to connect with God. But Christ taught a lesson for *all* time and for *all* people. We do not need to go far in today’s world to see parallels. I was once asked to speak with the parents of some young people attending with us. The parents knew little about the Bible and could not defend what they believed, but neither were they ready

to admit that they were in error, so they kept coming back to their confidence: *We can trace our church back to Peter through a continuous line of popes. Why can't you do the same?* My reply was that we can trace the Church and its doctrines through history, but their leaders had killed ours. They were shocked, and I had to explain to them the Inquisition and other aspects of their church's history. Nevertheless, they kept confidence in their "heritage," even though they were only nominal members of their church.

Back at the Well

Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman that "the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23–24). What did Christ mean by this?

The mainstream "Christian" denominations accept many humanly devised doctrines—some coming directly from pagan philosophical roots but with the name "Christian" slapped on them. But when Jesus told us to worship God in truth, He left no room for lying doctrines such as Christmas, Easter, the immortal soul, common misconceptions of heaven and hell, and Sunday as a substitute for the biblical Sabbath. Our doctrine must be found in the truth of Scripture. So, what about *spirit*?

The word *spirit* in 2 Corinthians 11:4 and John 4:24 is from the Greek *pneuma* and is generally understood to mean "air" or "wind"—though it has broad applications. We must be careful not to pick and choose meanings from *Strong's Concordance*, thinking we are Greek or Hebrew experts when we do not understand the nuances of the languages. While linguists can sometimes give helpful guidance, even they do not always agree on a meaning. Regarding these verses, *pneuma* is almost always translated as *spirit* and does not give us understanding beyond that. However, let us consider an instructive passage:

Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He? (1 Corinthians 10:18–22).

If we extrapolate this to so-called "Christianity," we see that there are different spirits behind the different

denominations. Jesus warned that many would come claiming His authority, declaring that He is the Christ, and will deceive many (Matthew 24:4–5). And God depicts mainstream Christianity as a great harlot with harlot daughters (Revelation 17:1–5). So, what then is the *right* spirit?

Two Spirits

Paul explains that there are two very different spirits at work in the world. There is "the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience." That spirit directs "the course of this world," and it is evidenced by "the lusts of our flesh" and in "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Ephesians 2:2–3).

The evidence of that spirit is "the works of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19–21), and Paul contrasts those works with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Paul faulted the brethren for accepting *a different spirit*, the focus of which was radically different from the Spirit of Christ. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (vv. 22–23).

The emphasis of our Sabbath services is on growing "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). And, as Paul did, we declare "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). We receive instruction not only on the person of Christ, but on how we can change our behavior to be more like His and can better follow His example of doing the Work of God (John 4:34).

In our sermons, we open the Bible and present a learning environment that is missing in worldly churches. Paul explained the purpose of this to Timothy, writing, "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).

The spirit of our worship is different from that of the denominations of this world. Some denominations are very formal and filled with an abundance of elaborate rituals with little biblical instruction. Charismatics have lively emotional services as they attempt to "stir up the spirit"—either humanly worked up or otherwise—so they can speak in gibberish. Others focus on entertainment, with bands playing "Christian Contemporary" or "Christian Rock" music. There are also the happy, clappy services with arms waving, "Amen" echoing, and tears flowing. There is something for everyone, and they all display a different spirit. If you have never been part of a mainstream denomination, you likely cannot fully appreciate the difference between these denominations and the Church of God.

Yes, there are Bible study groups that gather to study Scripture, but these are often gatherings where participants express personal opinions with little or no leadership or

guidance—and that is a problem. People in such groups are often very familiar with the Bible but miss the mark of truth.

Sincerity and Truth

Writing about the Days of Unleavened Bread, Paul admonished the Corinthian brethren to “keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8). Many individuals in mainstream denominations are deeply sincere, but they lack truth. And this brings me to the matter of God’s Church.

It can be easy for us to focus and rely upon our own heritage, location, and doctrines. Following the apostasy of the Worldwide Church of God—now ancient history for many—some members refused to leave that organization even though they could recognize doctrinal apostasy. Why? “*Because this is where God called me*”—trusting in *heritage*. Some believe that their ticket into the Kingdom, or at least into a place of safety, is being in the “right Church of God”—trusting in *location*. However, the more prevalent error we can make is *trusting in doctrine*: the Sabbath, the Holy Days, clean and unclean meats, the purpose for our existence, heaven and hell, law and grace, and more. For far too many, keeping the Sabbath and Holy Days is the only criterion for a true Christian.

Please do not misunderstand me. The heritage of God’s Church *is* important. Location is also important, as different groups have very different focuses—those who say “we are all the same” must consider why they have chosen to be where they are. That choice is not insignificant—is it just based on friends and family, or on something more?

Finally, doctrine *is* vitally important, as we must worship God in truth. But merely “having” the right doctrine is not the whole story. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus focused His comments on what is most important: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” And He continued with this vital point: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35). This passage inspired our hymn entitled “By This Shall All Men Know,” for though Jesus’ command to love one another was not new (Leviticus 19:18), to love one another *as Jesus has loved us* takes the command to a new level. We must live not only by the letter of the law, but also by its spiritual intent—which is not easy (Matthew 5:20–48).

What Do People See in Us?

What spirit do people encounter when they walk into Living Church of God services? Do they hear members gossiping about one another? Or do they find genuine love, affection, and support among us? Do they find us warm and friendly, or cold and standoffish? Each congregation is different,

just as the seven churches of Revelation each had their own personalities, but their examples indicate that there were challenges and problems to overcome. Nevertheless, Jesus’ words still stand: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” So, we must ask, *Is love what people see in me and in the congregation I attend?* If not, why not?

Many years ago, I knew a family that was just quietly serving in the way they could. When their name would come up in casual conversation, you often heard something like, “They were the first people in the Church to invite us to their home for dinner.” They were not seeking recognition—just living the fruits of the Spirit, obeying one of the last instructions Jesus gave His disciples: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:12–13).

Brethren, love is more than a feeling—it is an action that may or may not be accompanied by feelings. It is often what we do when it is not convenient or pleasant. This is laying down our life—putting others’ needs ahead of our personal desires. Paul wrote, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Galatians 5:25–26). And he explained that “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). This is key—yielding to the Spirit of Christ living in us.

The Corinthian brethren had many problems, as we see in Paul’s letters. There was drunkenness and gluttony at the Passover, infighting over whom to follow, a lack of financial support, sexual immorality, and a lack of respectful appreciation for the man whom God used to bring the Gospel to them. Paul was noticeably unsure about some of the Corinthians. Perhaps the Jews there were relying too much on their *heritage*. Others may have put their confidence in having one of the larger congregations—*location*. Still others may have trusted in having *doctrines* based in truth. Whatever the case, they no doubt saw themselves as secure in their calling, though some were clearly in great peril. That is why Paul warned, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

A most insightful lesson is found in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31–46). What is most profound is that neither group sees itself as it truly is. The goats think they are fine, but they are not—because they think of those beneath them as unimportant. The sheep, by contrast, see everyone as worthy of their time, effort, and concern. But whether people are sheep or goats, the grandiose things they do are not what distinguish them, but rather the little ways they treat others. May we all take time—indeed, *make* time—to love one another in word and in deed. (LN)



Is Perfectionism God's Way?

By **Rod McNair**

I was a bit of a perfectionist when I was a ten-year-old. I knew I should have spiritual goals, and I determined, *In five years, I want to overcome pride, greed, and selfishness.* Needless to say, I did not overcome pride, greed, and selfishness by age 15. I'm still working on those, decades later!

Are you a perfectionist? Many people suffer from one degree of perfectionism or another, and it damages their ability to move forward in life. It affects how they see themselves, and it affects their relationships—including their relationship with God. The hard part is that sometimes those of us who are in God's Church believe that *God* expects us to be perfectionists.

We're rightly serious about keeping God's laws, and the world often says that's why we sometimes struggle with perfectionism. But we know that accusation is not true, and we can see the proof in how the world is going crazy without God's law. The problem is not law-keeping.

So, what is the problem? Let's explore the question, *Is perfectionism God's way?*

What Did Jesus Mean?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of many deeply spiritual things, and He said, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). There it is, plain as day. So, perfection is our job, right?

The truth is that we can misunderstand what Christ said there. Let's look a little deeper. When we use the word *perfect*, we probably think of it as being without a mistake—scoring 100 percent on a test. But is God saying that the only standard that pleases Him in life is for us not to make any mistakes?

Another of Jesus' statements answers that question quickly and profoundly. In the parable of the talents, we read that servants were given different quantities of talents before their master went away. They were expected to use those talents, and when their master returned the first two had done something with what he had given them. But "then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gath-

ering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours'" (Matthew 25:24–25).

Notice that this servant had not lost his talent; he simply had not done anything with it. It's as if he was more fearful of making a mistake than he was willing to go out and do something with what he'd been given. And his master was furious with him, because he had not taken the time to invest his talent toward some positive return.

No, our life as Christians is not about our making no mistakes. That is not the goal that God has for us. Clearly, there's something else. What does this word, *perfect*, mean? The Greek word translated as *perfect* in Matthew 5:48 is *teleios*, and it means "having reached the end" and become "complete." We are familiar with *television*, *teleprompter*, *telescope*, and *teleconference*—*tele* essentially means "far away." It refers to something afar, right at the end. So, this word, *perfect*, is not simply about avoiding mistakes. Christ is talking about our reaching an endpoint, crossing the finish line, and becoming complete.

What about the Old Testament? The word *perfect* shows up there, too. Many assume that the Old Testament is harsher and meaner, so surely the Old Testament requirement was to not make any mistakes, right? We even read that "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations" (Genesis 6:9). But can you guess what that Hebrew word means? It's the Hebrew word *tamim*, and it means *complete*, just like *teleios*.

Are there any other words translated in our English-language Bibles as "perfect"? Yes, indeed. Another Hebrew word that the *King James Version* renders as "perfect" is *shalem*. We read, "Let your heart therefore be perfect [*shalem*] with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day" (1 Kings 8:61, *KJV*). But if you read that same verse in the *New King James Version*, you'll see, "Let your heart therefore be *loyal*," because *shalem* also means to be completed, faithful, finished—wholly devoted to God. We find that Hebrew and Greek words translated as perfect consistently mean *whole* or *complete*.

The common way we use *perfect* is "without mistake," but even researching the origin of the English word reveals that it came from a Latin verb meaning "to finish." The *King James Version* translators weren't wrong—they were just using an

older definition of the word. So, from every direction, we find that *perfect* does not mean what we often think it means today.

Perfection Means Full-Grown

Mr. Herbert Armstrong wrote in *The Missing Dimension in Sex* about the parallels between spiritual life and physical life: “As the human sperm cell is the very *smallest* of all human cells, even so, many newly begotten Christians start out with a very *small* measure of God’s Holy Spirit. Many may still be, at first, about 99.44 percent carnal” (p. 55). He wrote that an embryo doesn’t immediately look like a human being at conception, and newly begotten Christians don’t immediately look like their spiritual Father at baptism. When we are baptized, we are pure at that moment—sinless, innocent—but not yet perfect. If we were, we would be Spirit beings right then and there. But that’s not the plan, because perfection doesn’t simply mean sinless—perfection means full-grown.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus points us toward completion, telling us to strive toward the goal of being like God. This is very different from perfectionism. Yet we can sometimes get these concepts mixed up and put undue pressure on ourselves that does not help us move toward that goal.

We are to grow to be like our Father, and we are to grow to be like our elder Brother, Jesus Christ. That’s where we’re going. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:1–3). Sometimes we establish our own measure, our own imagination of righteousness, and that’s what we strive to attain to—but it’s not what God expects of us at all.

Notice the next verse: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (v. 4). The mainstream “Christian” world gets this verse wildly wrong, taking it to mean that Christ did away with the law. But that’s not what it means at all. The word translated here as “end,” interestingly enough, is related to the Greek word we saw earlier, *teleios*—referring to the goal, the completeness, the finish line. In other words, we don’t do away with the law, because it leads us and teaches us how to be like God.

This Article Is for You

So, who struggles with perfectionism? Brethren sometimes express doubts: *Am I pleasing God? Am I making Him happy and am I going to be in His Kingdom?* They’re striving to keep God’s laws, they’re walking this way of life, but they struggle with guilt. Maybe some, as we age, feel guilty that we can’t do some of the things we used to be able to do when we were younger. What about ladies in God’s Church? Sometimes

homemakers, wives, and mothers can think they need to be the perfect homemaker, the perfect wife, the perfect mother—that they’ve got to always do everything at 100 percent—and they feel guilty if they don’t do everything perfectly in running a household. Single ladies can also be wracked with guilt, thinking, *I don’t have the responsibility of taking care of a family, but I still don’t do things perfectly. Am I really pleasing God?* Unrealistic expectations can lead to perfectionism, disappointment, and discouragement.

Men, too, can be overwhelmed and perfectionistic. We can sometimes expect too much from our wives, if we’re married—we can be too critical and cranky. We can worry and fret over our responsibilities. At our jobs, we may even become workaholics because of perfectionism. Now, don’t get me wrong—it is important to have high standards and strive for excellence. But sometimes our misunderstanding of how to strive for excellence can send us down the wrong path and hurt us.

What about teenagers and young adults? There’s been a lot written about the pressures on young people today. Sure, there’s always been peer pressure and social pressure, but the Internet and the online experience have taken it to a whole different level, creating an unreal world that can cause a lot of problems when people compare themselves to the images others project of themselves. Parents need to do all we can to help our children navigate through this world and understand it.

Immediate Results vs. Long-Term Success

It can be helpful to examine two conflicting mindsets—one of perfectionism and the other oriented toward growth. Sometimes, when we’re struggling with something we need to change, we can become overly focused on instant results, and we may fall for perfectionism’s lie that we need to change everything immediately. What if a person didn’t exercise at all for six months, and then did one round of daily exercises? Would that immediately make the person totally fit? Of course not! We would never assume that it would, because we understand that change takes time. So why do we sometimes expect that kind of instant change within ourselves spiritually? Perfectionism demands immediate results, while a growth mindset is focused on long-term success.

When I was a teenager I played basketball, but I couldn’t jump well. So, I found a book with exercises meant to help you improve your jump. The book said to jump as high as you could and mark that spot on a wall, and then do your exercises every day for two weeks. Then, once those two weeks were up, you were to test yourself and see if you could hit that mark or higher. Of course, the temptation was to test yourself every day. But the book said not to—because, day-to-day, you’re not going to see growth. In fact, you might even regress occasionally. But if you’re doing your exercises, eventually you’re going to see growth.

Mr. Wallace Smith has talked about how God is looking at the long term, like a farmer. Farmers must plan, prepare a field, acquire the seed, and sow the seed. There is no instant success. They put the seed in the ground, and they wait. As they wait, there's growth—even when they don't see anything happening. And sometimes we can't see our growth—it's imperceptible. If you sit down to watch a tree grow, it doesn't

As parents, it can be difficult to strike the right balance of expecting obedience without being overly critical. But we must strive for that balance—certainly, acts of deception or rebellion need to be dealt with based on the infraction, **but we cannot be perfectionists who disdain or ridicule our children when they make mistakes.**

take long to realize that nothing's going to change right in front of you. But then you go about your business, and three years go by—and when you look at that tree again you know it was growing all the time, even when you couldn't see it happening. That is the way our lives are, too.

We read, “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous” (1 John 3:7). So, we are here to walk through our paces, to practice righteousness, to work toward being like God. We should never give ourselves a license to do evil, but neither should we discourage ourselves by expecting instant perfection.

Critical Disappointment vs. Patient Resilience

When we're in a growth mindset, mistakes and correction don't hurt as much as they do if we're in a mindset of perfectionism, where mistakes or correction can crush us and even cause us to lash out angrily. If we're horrified and disappointed when we make a mistake, we're forgetting what the process of our lives is about. Perfectionism leaves us easily discouraged, while a growth mindset keeps us resilient.

The more we have God's mindset, the more we have complete love. “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). Perfect love is God's full-grown, mature love. And the more we have that, the less fearful we're going to be about the future. When we follow God and walk with Him, we stumble and fall, but we repent, get back up, and keep going—and God is pleased with us. We can be confident in that.

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been

made perfect in love” (v. 18). What does it mean to be made perfect in love? It's not trying to attain to something that we work up humanly. It's God's love, looking at the endgame and seeing who we're trying to become like—our Father and our elder Brother. We ask Them to put Their love in us—and the more we have it, the less we fear. Having a growth-oriented mindset builds resilience in us, because we're not crushed when we make mistakes or receive necessary correction.

Another difference is that perfectionism is critical and demanding of others, while a growth mindset can accept mistakes with patience. Sometimes we can think, *I expect a lot of myself, and that's why I expect a lot from others*, and we can use that as an excuse to be demanding, critical, insulting, or demeaning. That's never what God is looking for.

As parents, it can be difficult to strike the right balance of expecting obedience

without being overly critical. But we must strive for that balance—certainly, acts of deception or rebellion need to be dealt with based on the infraction, but we cannot be perfectionists who disdain or ridicule our children when they make mistakes. Yes, we're going to be upset sometimes, but are we reassuring them? Are we showing them that we are genuinely trying to help them to grow? And is our own example showing them how to be successful adults?

We read, “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:4–8). When we fall into a perfectionist attitude, we're going to have the opposite of those qualities in dealing with other people. But if we're in a growth-oriented mindset, we're going to understand, *They're growing just like me*, whether they are our children, or friends, or our coworkers. A growth orientation helps us be patient when others make mistakes, instead of being quick to condemn or ridicule.

As parents, we can help our children learn how to navigate a world where young people are increasingly struggling with pressures of perfectionism. When I was young, I beat myself up a lot, struggling with, *Who am I? Where is my place in this world? What does it mean to become mature and to overcome, spiritually?* Today, I am so thankful that my father and mother helped me navigate through that difficult time. Parents, don't underestimate your ability to help your children navigate the challenges they face. Sit down and listen to them, walk through problems with them, come up with solutions

with them. Find out what's on their mind and help them figure out their life. What is a more important investment than helping our children understand how to face the world?

Distortion vs. Balance

Perfectionism presents a distorted view of the Christian walk, but a growth-oriented mindset brings a balanced and healthy view. Paul wrote, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Galatians 5:16–17).

So, how do we live a balanced and healthy life? We grow as we decide every day to follow the prompting of God's Spirit instead of the flesh. And every time we follow the lead of the Spirit, we can think of that as one millimeter of growth on a tree—it may not look like much by itself. But as years go by, when we stack it up with every other millimeter, we see that it's real.

And what about our failures? "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (vv. 19–21). If we're looking at our lives and finding fruit like that, we need to reevaluate the path we're going down. We can see the path we're on from the fruit on the tree.

By contrast, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (vv. 22–23). What fruit do we find in our life? Do we have a sense of these traits developing in us? We're not going to be perfect—neither without sin nor fully mature—until we are changed into Spirit. But are we growing in that direction? Are we trying to make progress? If we don't see some of the fruits that we are seeking, we need to get on our knees and ask God for help!

Sometimes we're in deep trials, struggling with difficult things happening in our lives, and we can feel, *I'm not growing*. Maybe we don't have a lot of joy or peace at that time, but maybe God is teaching us longsuffering or faithfulness. When we struggle, we should consider that there may indeed be fruit, but we just aren't seeing it because we're not looking for that particular fruit.

We can become so fixated on our lack of perfection that we miss the very real fruit that is growing in our lives. In my garden, I have a plum tree that I love. When I go out and look at it in the early spring, its fruits are hard to see, because they're green, like its leaves. At first, it's easy to think there's no fruit—but when I look a little closer, I see one. As soon

as I see it, I can imagine what it's going to taste like, and I'm looking forward to when it will ripen. Perfectionism can blind us so we don't see what God is doing in our lives—growth that would be encouraging if we would focus on it. We need to recognize and be thankful for what God is doing as we ask Him for continual help in our growth.

Growing in Perspective

So, are you a perfectionist? Even if you are, don't be discouraged. You just need to develop a different way of thinking about perfection—a growth-oriented mindset. God doesn't keep a permanent record of our mistakes. When we repent, He removes our sins from us "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). His eyes are on the finish line, and ours need to be on it as well.

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God" (1 John 3:1–2). We are only begotten—still in the embryo stage. Maybe we're no longer 99.44 percent carnal—maybe we've grown since we've been baptized but we're still 88.33 percent carnal. We may not feel like that's enough, but it means we're making progress and looking more and more like our Father as that embryo grows.

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (vv. 2–3). This is growth. We purify ourselves because we can see, even if only dimly, that someday we're going to look face-to-face into the eyes of our Father and our elder Brother and be like Them not only in glory, but in character. We're in the process of that purification now, little by little.

Perfectionism is a trap that hinders us from making real progress on our path of spiritual development. Instead of being discouraged, we need to focus on genuine growth. We need to grow day by day, not stagnate in discouragement. We need to look forward to the day when we see God and are like Him. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:3–6). The word translated *complete* here has the same root verb as *teleios*, because perfection and completeness are the same.

Brethren, if we're striving to live God's way of life, to obey His commandments, and to respond to His Spirit, we can have confidence that we are walking with God, and we will become perfect when we enter the Kingdom of God at the resurrection. (LN)



How Is the Lord Our Shepherd?

By **John Robinson**

When I was a teenager, my father would try to make me memorize something from the Bible every so often. For about a year, every Sabbath, I brushed up on Psalm 23 in case my dad would ask me to recite it. With only six verses, it's not terribly difficult to memorize—here it is, from beginning to end:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

But how should each of us personally understand the idea that the Lord is our shepherd? What should that mean to us? Let's examine three things every good shepherd does, so we can see how the Lord fulfills this role.

A Shepherd Guides

Shepherds have been around for thousands of years. There are several notable shepherds in the Bible, and to be a shepherd was to hold a time-honored role. Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Rachel, Jacob's sons, Moses, and David were all shepherds for at least part of their lives.

A shepherd needs to have excellent knowledge of the terrain around him, because he needs to guide his sheep to the best meadows, to where the water spots are, to the best grazing areas, to where there are fewer predators, and to where there's a place to protect the sheep, especially in the evenings. He needs to know and lead the sheep down the right paths. Years ago, when I was in the Tetons with a group of hikers, we went down a path called "the Devil's Staircase," and it lived

up to its name! That's the kind of path that a shepherd should know about, to navigate his flock past such difficult terrain.

Psalm 23:1 says, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." Other translations are, "The LORD is my shepherd; I lack nothing" (*New English Translation*) and "The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need" (*New Living Translation*). These are all good ways of phrasing what's being said here to each of us personally. In the Old Testament, God, though He worked with individual men from time to time, was generally working with the group, the nation of Israel itself. But this psalm is meant for each of us separately, not only for a larger group.

There is no better example of a shepherd than Jesus Christ. In John 10:14, He refers to Himself as "the good shepherd." He is also called "the Chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4). Christ, who has always perfectly fulfilled all of His roles, is the perfect Shepherd.

Now consider how the next two verses add a little more detail about the Shepherd. What does He do? "He makes me [the individual] to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (vv. 2–3). Verse 2 can also be translated, "He takes me to lush pastures, he leads me to refreshing water" (*NET*).

Shepherded to Righteousness

That the Shepherd *leads* is mentioned twice—He leads the flock, and He leads us individually. Where does He lead us? To rest and peace, as we take the paths of righteousness. One of the ways that Jesus Christ, as our Shepherd, leads us past danger is through His law. As a good shepherd, Christ leads us on the paths of righteousness by helping us stay within those safe boundaries.

The book of Proverbs says, "My son, keep your father's command, and do not forsake the law of your mother.... For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life, to keep you from the evil woman, from the flattering tongue of a seductress" (6:20, 23–24). Most commentaries only talk about this seductress in the most literal sense—somebody who entices a man into sexual immorality—but overlook how God also uses the seductress on occasion to symbolize idol worship. So, what do these com-

mands from a mother and father to their children do? They function as a light and as a way of staying on the right path, to keep their children from sexual immorality and idolatry.

The best way to stay out of danger, as depicted in this account of the seductress and her hapless victim, is to stick to the paths of righteousness—the safe boundaries within the law of God. “Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way” (Psalm 119:104). A false way is a different path, one that moves us away from the paths of righteousness. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments” (vv. 105–106). As we come to understand the reasons *behind* God’s rules, we come to realize in a profound way that they serve as boundary markers to keep us from falling off the cliff, from veering off the path into dangerous areas. That’s what our Shepherd is trying to do—keep us safe by keeping us in the paths of righteousness.

“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:7–8). It’s interesting that God’s law can make the simple wise. It doesn’t take a sheep expert to understand that sheep aren’t always the brightest creatures—they need to know the shepherd, they need to trust the shepherd, and they need to recognize his voice to be guided on the right paths. If they do, they’re going to stay out of danger even if they’re not the brightest sheep of the bunch.

The *New English Translation* renders Psalm 19:7 this way: “The law of the LORD is perfect and preserves one’s life.” It includes a footnote that says this could also mean “restores life.” Elsewhere, it can mean to “rescue or preserve one’s life,” or to “‘revive one’s strength’ (emotionally or physically).” So, following the paths of righteousness, being guided by God’s law, has both a *preservative* and a *restorative* effect on us—the sheep of His pasture.

Let’s look at another biblical example. In the Song of Moses, the celebratory hymn that the Israelites sang after God rescued them from the Egyptians, we see God depicted as leading like a good shepherd: “Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? You stretched out Your right hand; the earth swallowed them. You in Your mercy have led forth the people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation” (Exodus 15:11–13). What was God intending to lead them to? The Promised Land—abundant food, water, rest, and peace. “You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established” (v. 17).

A shepherd guides with his voice, and his sheep know that sound well. Psalm 95 brings this out, while also reminding us that those who are rebellious of heart don’t ever arrive at the green pastures or the still waters:

He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: “Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, ‘It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.’ So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest’” (vv. 7–11).

One commentary has this to say about hearing the Shepherd’s voice: “‘To hear his most holy word’ is presented here as one of the prime acts of worship. And ‘hear,’ or *hearken to*, has often the added dimension in Hebrew of ‘obey,’ for which the Old Testament has virtually no other word.... So the worshipper singing this psalm is reminded to ask himself *how* he hears — will it be obediently? — and for whose *voice* he listens” (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: A Commentary on Books III–V of the Psalms*).

Jesus Christ, as the good Shepherd, knows the terrain. He knows where the food, pasture, and waters are. He knows how to navigate past difficulties—past paths that you don’t want to be going down—and He keeps the sheep safe by guiding them on paths to safe pastures with abundant water.

A Shepherd Protects

Shepherds had a tough job. Jacob, when he had finally had enough of Laban, said, “There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes” (Genesis 31:40). Shepherds had to live with the sheep for as long as they were in the pastureland, and they had to be vigilant, because there were many predators looking to take the sheep.

David proclaimed, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4). Even in the darkest of circumstances, we still trust that the Shepherd will take care of us. Even in death, there is the hope of the resurrection. The Shepherd is always faithful, and the Shepherd is always there. “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:9–11).

The shepherd had two primary instruments he could use to protect his sheep from danger: a rod and a staff. These were

very different implements with different purposes, though both were used to care for and protect the sheep.

The *rod* is primarily a symbol of protection and authority—shepherds used the rod to fend off predators and to protect the sheep from harm. They could also use it to keep the sheep obedient and keep them from wandering into dangerous areas. A modern word for it might be *club*. In the biblical context, the rod represents God's protection. It assures

Christ, as the good Shepherd, truly laid down His life for His sheep. **As an enclosure for protecting sheep, a sheepfold is an excellent metaphor for Christ, who keeps His flock safe.**

us that, as long as we believe God is there, He will defend us and ensure our safety. In the book of Revelation, Christ is depicted three times as having a rod of iron, which He uses to correct and to rule.

The *staff* is much longer than the rod, and it is used to guide and support the sheep. Shepherds would use the staff to nudge the sheep gently in the right direction—it often had a hook at one end that could be used to lift a sheep out of a difficult spot. As we walk the paths of righteousness, even though we have God's commandments and we're doing our best to follow them, we're still human beings, and God has to nudge us back onto the path from time to time. The shepherd has His staff to do that.

The *rod* symbolizes protection and discipline, and the *staff* symbolizes guidance and support. Together, they give a complete sense of care and protection for the flock.

The Shepherd's Sheepfold

Another way the shepherd protected his sheep, especially in the evening, was by keeping them in a sheepfold. A sheepfold, in ancient times, was often low walls of stacked stones—a narrow door allowed the sheep to pass into this sheepfold, where they would be protected for the night. Often, the shepherd would actually lie across the door so that no predator could come in except by climbing over the walls.

Jesus Christ, as the good Shepherd, spoke about His sheepfold:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." ... Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:1–3, 7–16).

edly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:1–3, 7–16).

Christ, as the good Shepherd, truly laid down His life for His sheep. A door keeping the sheep safely in the sheepfold and keeping thieves out is an excellent metaphor for Christ, who keeps His flock safe. There are many things that attack the flock that is the Church of God, and Christ is always the good Shepherd, ever vigilant—He never grows tired, and He never sleeps. He's always there looking out for His sheep.

A Shepherd Heals

As the psalm continues, we read, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over" (v. 5). There are many references to anointing with oil, and one with which we are quite familiar is anointing for healing.

One of the ways that shepherds took care of their sheep was by "passing them under the rod." The most common way they did this began with them standing in the doorway of the sheepfold. As the sheep went through the doorway, the shepherd would hold the rod just high enough for the sheep to be able to wriggle under it with effort. The purpose of this was to slow the sheep down, allowing the shepherd to inspect their physical condition as they went under the rod—a practice known as "rodding."

Even today, shepherds must regularly check the condition of their sheep, which still get scraped up, get bruised, or eat things they shouldn't. Shepherds bandage sheep where they are hurt and may spray wounded areas with antibiotics.

Sheep still get hurt, predators still try to take them, and shepherds have to give each one care according to its needs.

Even after the events of the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, when God begins to regather the remnant of Israel back to the Promised Land, He's still going to meet with them and inspect their condition—both physically and, even more importantly, spiritually. There are still going to be rebels among the people, and those will not be allowed to enter the land of Israel:

“As I live,” says the Lord GOD, “surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you,” says the Lord GOD. “I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD” (Ezekiel 20:33–38).

The Bible likens the House of Israel to lost sheep, and Luke 15 reveals that God devotes His time and effort to reclaiming even one missing sheep out of a hundred. We see that God will treat and heal the Israelites who come through the Second Exodus. One way will be by inspecting them—their physical and spiritual condition—but another way will be by bringing them back into the bond of the covenant through a purge of the rebellious among them. That covenant comprises God's laws, statutes, and judgments. Those are the paths of righteousness, and He will lovingly and tenderly put His sheep back onto those paths.

Care for All of His Flock

Jeremiah gives us another description of the Second Exodus from the perspective of the good Shepherd: “I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking” (Jeremiah 23:3–4). That by itself is almost a summary of Psalm 23.

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign

and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jeremiah 23:5–6). Again, the paths the shepherd leads the flock along are paths of *righteousness*. The Branch that God will establish, identified as David's righteous descendant, is Jesus Christ, who will reign over all. Under His authority, we will serve as righteous shepherds.

Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘In this place which is desolate, without man and without beast, and in all its cities, there shall again be a dwelling place of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down. In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the lowland, in the cities of the South, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, the flocks shall again pass under the hands of him who counts them,’ says the LORD (Jeremiah 33:12–13).

A shepherd cares for every need of his flock. As part of that care, he evaluates the condition of the sheep and treats their injuries and ailments. What about all the sheep who rebelled in the past? The concept of healing extends to the idea of being resurrected back to life. As the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones shows (Ezekiel 37:1–14), the faithful Shepherd of Israel is there to care for the resurrected people and put them on the paths of righteousness as well. Christ as our Shepherd goes beyond even the most advanced medical care, even resurrecting the dead back to life. If Jesus Christ were not the righteous, faithful, and true Shepherd that He is, the dead would have no hope. But He acts for His name's sake, to show the rest of the world that He is faithful to Israel despite its rebellion.

Jesus Christ, in His role as the good Shepherd and Chief Priest, looks over each of us in a very personal way. He guides us in the paths of righteousness with His commandments, statutes, judgments, and ministry. He uses His staff to nudge us back onto the safe paths. He vigilantly protects us within His sheepfold, and He examines us individually with great care, evaluating us as we pass under His rod. He restores our soul as we walk the paths of righteousness, and He will heal even those who have already died.

Hebrews 13 reveals that “the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant” makes us “complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever” (vv. 20–21) And Jesus Christ does all this because He is the good Shepherd and He loves His sheep. (L^N)



HQ Highlight: The Legal & Risk Management Department

Mr. Tom Turner, who led the Living Church of God's Legal & Risk Management Department for more than 20 years, wrote in the May-June 1999 issue of the *Living Church News* that "prudently addressing and managing the organization's risk exposures allows the Work to move forward unimpeded, by avoiding the unnecessary and costly delays brought about by unprepared-for risks becoming *reality*." No doubt Mr. Turner would be pleased to know that the Legal & Risk Management Department (L&R), now led by Mr. Dexter Wakefield and staffed by Jill Ewers, Mrs. Eva Veronese, and Mrs. Maranda Pirotte, remains a bulwark against the many legal complications that could otherwise undermine the Church's mission.

We at the *Living Church News* recently had the pleasure of interviewing L&R to find out more about how this essential department works to protect God's Church. We hope you enjoy reading their valuable perspectives—and that doing so gives you an even greater appreciation for their vital work!

Protecting the Church

As Mr. Turner wrote decades ago, protecting the Church so that it can continue to accomplish the Work it has been given is the key responsibility of L&R—and such a task requires both strong leadership and tireless support. Thankfully, the ladies of L&R are "diligent, knowledgeable, smart, and well-trained," says Mr. Wakefield.

Providing legal protection to the Church is no simple task, and it involves virtually every aspect of preaching the Gospel and feeding the flock—including something as fundamental as where to meet for Sabbath services. One of the many areas in which L&R is involved is contract review. "We spend a lot of time on that," says Mr. Wakefield. "Every contract—from the halls to all the vendors—has to be reviewed and signed off."

Risk management involves insurance and is "another major activity," Mr. Wakefield says. This includes "health insurance, liability, automobile insurance, and things of that nature. All those policies have to be negotiated to ensure we have the coverages we want. One of the most difficult things we face is the cost of insurance."

This is one of several areas in which Mr. Wakefield is grateful for the help of his administrative assistant, Mrs. Eva Veronese. "I am responsible for maintaining all of the

Church's insurance policies," she reports, "from policy and coverage renewal and acquisition, to claims."

But this barely scratches the surface. "Another big activity is corporate documentation and management," Mr. Wakefield continues. Many are not aware of how many corporate entities are necessary to maintain the Church's international reach, both in preaching the Gospel and feeding the flock. "We oversee more than 25 entities," says Mr. Wakefield, "and we're forming more all the time. We're in the process of forming a couple of new organizations in Africa right now. The situation there can change quite a bit, because local laws are changing. We're adjusting our operations to handle that."

Mrs. Veronese's assistance again proves essential in this regard. "One of my primary roles is to help fulfill the corporate requirements and needs of our international companies and to assist in the formation of new entities," she explains, "all of which need to remain compliant with the laws of the nations in which they operate—from required corporate and financial meetings and filings, to employment practices, to customs requirements, to banking, to media and privacy policies—and the list goes on."

The broad mission of the L&R team requires each member to have a wide range of knowledge. Describing her role in the department, Mrs. Maranda Pirotte says that administrative support is her primary function, "particularly in the areas of copyright and trademarks, visa matters, data privacy, and security," but every member of the team is cross-trained to fill a multitude of departmental needs.

"Often, our projects or initiatives result from a change in legislation or the identification of a risk," says Mrs. Pirotte. "One major project our department faced was the [European Union's] introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)," which affects every organization that processes information about EU residents, no matter the location of the organization itself. "Today, I continue to help monitor updates to GDPR and associated legislation, as well as assist our Data Privacy Managers with ensuring our data usage remains in compliance with our policies."

"We also handle trademark compliance," Mr. Wakefield continues. "Immigration issues come up, too. When we have students coming in from another country, there's lots of activity."

L&R is devoted not only to protecting the Church, but also to helping its members. International grant assistance is a major avenue by which it provides that help. “This is something I really enjoy,” Mr. Wakefield says, “because we get to give away money. The grants have to be extremely precise to be legally compliant. We review them not only for their legal aspects but

For God’s Church to carry out His Work, staying in line with government regulations isn’t just helpful—it’s essential. “We are to respect the governing authorities,” says Mr. Wakefield.

also for financial details—I am also Treasurer and Vice President of Finance, which helps the Finance and Legal departments collaborate to finalize these.”

As Mr. Wakefield wrote in this year’s May-June *Living Church News*, God’s people are dedicated to the giving way of life, and another way L&R helps the Church put that way into practice is by ensuring disaster-relief compliance. “Whenever a hurricane approaches the Gulf Coast, we prepare in advance,” says Mr. Wakefield by way of example. “Pastors have a certain amount of authority to help with immediate needs, but anything beyond that has to go through a process for grants. For international disasters, we have a separate process to ensure regulatory compliance before sending assistance.” Without the work of L&R, the Church’s attempts to provide monetary aid could hurt more than help!

Challenges and Risks

L&R also assists Church members with navigating some of the challenges that naturally arise from keeping God’s law in man’s world, meeting one such challenge by giving advice and documentation that can be helpful to members who must take time off from work or school to keep God’s Sabbath and Holy Days. “In the U.S., we often aid our adherents in navigating conscientious objection to military service, jury duty, or religious discrimination,” adds Mrs. Veronese. “We also have to use caution in the words used to preach the Gospel in certain areas of the world so that we are able to continue to distribute literature and air the telecasts.” As part of this caution, Mr. Wakefield reviews Church literature before publication (including this very magazine!) and every sermon considered for online release.

As the name would imply, Risk Management is an essential part of L&R’s work. “On the Risk Management side,” says Mrs. Veronese, “I am responsible for making sure that our U.S. and International camps and Feast sites are compliant with all country-specific and U.S.-state-specific safety regulations and that all activities are approved for insurance purposes. I also help to process certain contracts and permits.”

For God’s Church to carry out His Work, staying in line with government regulations isn’t just helpful—it’s essential. “We are to respect the governing authorities,” says Mr. Wakefield, “So, we’re very careful to stay well within compliance requirements. It’s very important that people know that.”

In a world where even meeting for Sabbath services can be met with hostility, the importance of L&R’s work cannot be overstated. “It is a real challenge for brethren to even meet for services in some international areas due to lack of safety and due to prohibitions of religious worship,” says Mrs. Veronese. “We are tasked with finding ways to help in these situations. In one nation, for example, we will need to register as a society—and in addition we will need another religious organization to say that we’re legitimate.”

If all of this sounds complicated, that’s because it is. “One of the biggest challenges is the perception that L&R is a department that makes the operation of certain activities or actions rather inconvenient,” Mrs. Veronese adds. “We always hope that everyone understands the complexity of our responsibility to keep the Church insurable and safe from litigation—or even closure.”

A Rewarding and Crucial Role

By now, it should come as no surprise that working in L&R can be stressful. However, the team finds the work rewarding, knowing how important it is to the ongoing mission of the Church. For Mrs. Pirotte, “the most rewarding part of working in this department is helping find solutions that keep the Church legally compliant in the many jurisdictions where it operates and mitigate its risks, while supporting the needs of the field and other departments.”

Mrs. Veronese finds fulfillment in “working with and getting to know the men and women in various parts of the world—mostly volunteers—who keep the Work growing and prospering despite the hardships they encounter.”

Mr. Wakefield reiterates that he enjoys the process of international grant assistance. “Giving away funds to support the Church’s efforts and ministry around the world is rewarding,” he says. “Disaster relief is also fulfilling. We disperse quite a bit of our funds in a helpful and controlled way. When we have a chance to help people, it has to be done exactly right, but we are able to make a difference.”

The Legal & Risk Management Department is small, but God works through it mightily to protect His Church from many perils. We are certainly grateful for the L&R team’s willingness to spend some time with us, and we can all pray that God continues to bless its invaluable efforts to keep the Work moving forward!

—Editorial Staff

The 2025 All-Africa Ministerial Conference

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

Africa is a large and diverse continent, home to many different peoples, cultures, and languages. However, at the recent All-Africa Ministerial Conference, held in Kenya from February 3–5, it was very evident that the leadership representing its Living Church of God congregations is of one accord and one Spirit.

The conference was held at the Starling Bird Resort off Mombasa Road, southeast of Nairobi, where 27 ministers represented about 1,500 members and attendees from 76 congregations and eleven African countries.

Some, especially in North America, may not know that our attendance in the United States makes up only about 47 percent of our attendance worldwide. The Living Church of God has a vigorous and growing membership in Africa, and God continues to call the people He chooses from all around the world, even in the remote areas of their countries. And we pray that He will continue to provide dedicated ministers to serve His flock wherever it resides, as He has in Africa.

Many Languages, One Gospel

Presentations at the conference were given in English and translated into Swahili and French. English and Swahili are Kenya's official languages, and most brethren speak one or both of those along with their traditional tribal dialect. In Kenya, where there are more than 30 distinct languages and dialects in four major language groups, the tribal language most-spoken is Kikuyu. Many of our members in the western portion of Kenya speak Luo.

South Africa has twelve official languages, with Zulu, Afrikaans, and English widely spoken. Zambia has many languages spoken by its various tribal groups, but the English of its colonial times is the nation's official language. Zimbabwe has 16 official languages, and English is the most common second language because of the country's colonial days. In Tanzania, English and Swahili are spoken along with dozens of other dialects—our ministry there speaks Swahili.

Having a language in common is an important factor in creating a national identity. In the nations of Western Africa, the *lingua franca*—the common language—is the French of

their colonial days. As a result, we at Headquarters in Charlotte communicate with our Kenyan and South African ministry in English, but our communications with Congo, Cameroon, or Côte d'Ivoire often must be translated into French.

Though all these languages and dialects may sound very different, these various tongues all speak the same thing when it comes to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and the truth that the Living Church of God teaches. There was a great unity of faith and all present at the conference shared one Spirit.

Long Journeys

For those traveling from the U.S. to Kenya, the trip is a long one, with the usual route being Charlotte to London to Nairobi. From Charlotte, Mr. Gerald Weston stopped off in London to meet with the brethren there and to speak at Sabbath services on February 1. I traveled straight through from Charlotte to Nairobi—about 24 hours door-to-door—and served at Sabbath services on February 1 with the Nairobi brethren. Also in Nairobi, prior to the conference, Mr. and Mrs. Simon Muthama were very kind to provide a pleasant lunch and afternoon meeting at their home for me and several of the traveling ministers.

Depending on location, travel in Africa can be challenging compared to travel in other parts of the world, and many of the ministers traversed long distances by bus, automobile, or air to attend the conference.

While the trip for the U.S. ministers took a considerable amount of time, some ministers who were traveling within Africa had a much more difficult journey. For instance, three of our French-speaking ministers from Burundi—Mr. Zacharie Ngendakumana, Mr. Marc Nkunuzimana, and Mr. Juvenal Karibwami—had an arduous three-day journey in which they used private vans, public buses, and member transport. There were long delays at the borders, and road conditions sometimes slowed travel. But, having arrived, they were excited to attend the conference and felt that it was well worth the difficulties.

Upon arrival at the conference, there was much joyful meeting and greeting with old friends and new acquaintances. As previously mentioned, 27 ministers attended from eleven

African countries, representing Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. Ministers attending from outside of Africa came not only from the U.S., but also from Belgium and the United Kingdom.

Conferring Together

The reasonably priced Starling Bird Resort is located about 25 miles (41 kilometers) southeast of the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi. The attractive, fenced-in facilities of this resort are in a preserve area, reached upon traveling about two miles down an unpaved road. Conference attendees found the rooms to be clean and comfortable, with good mosquito nets, and the resort staff was friendly and helpful. Hyenas could occasionally be heard in the distance at night, but not much wildlife was visible locally.

Well-prepared meals were served cafeteria-style under an outdoor canopy, and the attendees moved between tables to get to know each other better. Since the altitude of the Nairobi area is more than a mile high (about 1,800 meters), the temperature was comfortable.

The attendees arrived at the conference on February 3 and departed February 6. Presentations and panel discussions were led by ministers including Mr. Gerald Weston, Mr. Peter Nathan, Dr. Scott Winnail, and me. There were also area reports given by Mr. Simon Muthama, Mr. Rees Ellis, Mr. Ryan van der Watt, and Mr. Lawdi Ferreira. Topics included preaching the Gospel, feeding the flock, handling administrative matters, and navigating legal difficulties in Africa. Also discussed were translation issues, the use of technology, the history of God's Church in Africa, and fulfilling literature requests. Ministers received spiritual encouragement and advice, and they also participated in a question-and-answer session.

Attendees were thankful that Mrs. Helen Abok, the widow of Mr. Ephraim Abok, was able to attend, and they were very encouraged to see the ministerial ordinations of Mr. Hermann

Loko-Aikpe of Benin and Mr. André Donhachi of Cameroon. God is providing more laborers for His fields in Africa.

After the Conference

At the departure time, there were fond goodbyes as most of the ministers began their trip home, while Mr. and Mrs. Weston, Mr. Nathan, and I continued onward by van for the long drive to Kendu Bay in western Kenya, traveling by way of the Great Rift Valley.

The Kendu Bay brethren have a tradition that visitors plant a tree when they come so they will want to return to see how it has grown. Mr. Weston, Mr. Nathan, and I all planted trees at the Church's Kendu Bay site and hope for another visit. Mrs. Abok provided a fine luncheon at her home.

On the Sabbath of February 8, Mr. Weston spoke at the Church's Kendu Bay facilities, and later in the day he gave a sermon to brethren in the village of Othoro. I traveled to the Kokuro congregation, where the local brethren have constructed a meeting hall, at which 94 were present. In each location, the sermons were translated sequentially ("consecutive interpretation") into the region's Luo language. Since there is often no electricity available at the buildings, the Kenyan brethren typically sing hymns without accompaniment but with harmony—and often enjoy spontaneous singing before and after services as well. The brethren are warm and friendly, and when we entered the congregations, we always knew right away that we were among brothers and sisters in Christ.

On the evening after the Sabbath of February 8, a large outdoor dinner was held, featuring a variety of Kenyan foods and attended by many from the local congregation. The food was cooked over open fires at the site, as is usually done for such occasions. The Kenyan brethren bade loving goodbyes to their guests and urged all to return soon.

The next day, the Church's trusty local driver, Carlos, took us to the airport at Kisumu for the flight back to Nairobi. Many international flights out of Kenyatta International



Mr. Wakefield and the Kokuro congregation

Airport depart around midnight, so there was time for an evening Bible Study at a nearby hotel. Mr. Weston spoke to the brethren, some of whom traveled a long distance to attend from surrounding congregations.

The African brethren expressed great appreciation and support for the Work being done through the Church. Some said that they considered Mr. Weston's visit to be historic for the African congregations, since it has been many years since there has been such a visit. There is clearly a great unity of Spirit and purpose among the African ministry and brethren of the Living Church of God, and they send their love and regards to all. (LN)



Mr. Weston speaking with
Thomas Kithinji of Kibirichia, Kenya



The conference



Luncheon at the Muthamas' home



Luncheon at Mrs. Helen Abok's home



Mr. Onono Ligaye of the Ndhiwa congregation in Kenya said, "Tell them, 'Hello from Mr. Onono, a man with no teeth.'"



Mr. Nathan planting a tree with the Kendu Bay brethren

TITUS 2:3-5

Woman to Woman

Helping Our Children Choose Life

By **Jeanine Smith**

When the Worldwide Church of God fell into apostasy, many of those I had grown up with chose to leave God's truth. At that time, I was struck by God's command, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19). I stood on the threshold of motherhood, and I prayed often that God would help me teach my children so that, when it came time for them to choose between life and death, they could make the right decision.

But how do we teach our children so that, when they are old enough, they can make an informed decision to *choose life*?

While God tells fathers that they are to teach their children, a lot of responsibility falls to mothers because of the way God designed the family structure. Certainly, dads should teach their children God's laws—and set household rules that help their families live within those laws—but since moms generally spend more time at home with the children, we have countless opportunities to show them God's laws in action. It is important that both parents show their children that they support each other's decisions—if they disagree, sitting privately and sorting things out is a far better example than yelling from different sides of the house or going for days saying only a few words to each other.

All of us were raised by imperfect human parents. Perhaps your parents set a "good Church-family example" but showed more carnal attitudes behind closed doors. Thankfully, you can decide to make your parenting different. You can make purposeful decisions to help make choosing life a little easier for your own children.

Helping Them Delight in the Sabbath

As moms, our day-to-day living—how we react to the ups and downs of circumstances and the choices we make—is a big part of what living God's way looks like to our children. We can accidentally make God's way look like a burden if we just tell our kids things like, *No, you can't play on a baseball team, because most games are on the Sabbath*. Why make God's way

seem like something that only says *no*? God says, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). A caring and involved mother can help her children understand that God's laws help them enjoy the benefits of having fun without the repercussions that come from skewed priorities: *Living God's way is better than being on the baseball team, and I can still join a pickup game every so often*. That's a much better conclusion than *God won't let me*.

Speaking of the Sabbath—*can* our children delight in it? Or is it a day when we are too busy studying to talk to them and a day full of things they can't do? Family Sabbath traditions can provide fun ways to help set the day apart from other days, though what works for one family may not work for another. One mother may enjoy making an elaborate meal to welcome the Sabbath, but having a simple bowl of soup may be better for another family. In every family, the lesson should be that shutting out the world marks the beginning of a Sabbath evening spent reflecting on God and His way of life.

The Sabbath should not be a day when Mommy is consumed by study, but rather a day when she can go outside and watch ants with the three-year-old, or when the twelve-year-old can help her make a nice breakfast that doesn't have to be rushed. Perhaps the Sabbath can be a day for the family to have lunch in a garden park or for brethren to visit. These experiences create pleasant Sabbath memories rather than memories of restrictions.

When my boys were still at an age when toys on the floor would distract them from the need to get dressed for Sabbath services, I wanted to motivate them to focus on getting ready. So, I kept a jar filled with chocolates on the piano, and when it was time to get ready for services, if the boys could "beat Dad" in getting dressed, they would each get a chocolate. It became a fun Sabbath game—we now have fond memories of giggling little boys army-crawling into our room to snatch my husband's dress shoes and toss them down the hall to "slow Daddy down," and they would beg me to help them tie their ties faster because "Daddy is going to win!" Later, we drove long circuits between congregations, so when we discovered a fun shop that sold LEGO and LEGO-compatible toys, we made it a custom to stop there after the Sabbath was over so the boys could look around.

Those are among the strategies that worked for us, but in every family there are ways to make the Sabbath something in which your children delight.

Helping Them Learn from Deleavening

When the Spring Holy Days draw near, we might think, *I need to spring-clean, and I can combine that with deleavening!* But does this approach make our children start to *dread* the Days of Unleavened Bread?

Be careful not to let preparation for the Days of Unleavened Bread become frustrating and overly time-consuming. Remember what God's command actually says: "You shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel" (Exodus 12:15). Note that He does not say you must go through every drawer looking for leaven that no one would have put there anyway. If it is not your normal practice to hide cookies in a closet, why must you de-leaven that closet? If you have a toddler who may have eaten a cookie in the closet, a quick vacuuming is enough—everything doesn't need to be pulled apart.

Children—even little children—can certainly help clean. But do they have to endure Mom's inspecting everything with a white glove to ensure that not a crumb has been overlooked? It's much more encouraging to hand a seven-year-old the vacuum and say, "Okay, we need to deleaven your bedroom," and then help to pull toys out from under the bed so the child

Family Sabbath traditions can provide fun ways to help set the day apart from other days, though what works for one family may not work for another.

can use the vacuum attachment. While you help, you can talk about *why* you are doing this.

There doesn't have to be fear of missing a single crumb, as if obeying God's command hinges on it. The self-evaluation we do to draw closer to God is much more important. With older kids, we can explain that we *can't* remove *all* the physical leaven, because yeast spores are in the air—and that this reminds us of how we can never be rid of all our sin without His help. God said to *get the leavened food and leavening agents out*, so we do that, but we focus more on the internal self-examination that goes on during that time of year.

Teach what God *says* to do without making His way harder than it needs to be. Perhaps "spring" cleaning can take place in early summer, if you feel it's necessary—but as children grow, make sure they understand the difference between the practice of spring cleaning and the biblical command to deleaven. Don't add to God's law—help your children choose life.

Helping Them Rejoice at the Feast

The world can make the Feast of Tabernacles difficult for our children. Getting time off for the Feast can be a real challenge for those in public or private schools—and then there's the issue of getting all that homework done. How we choose to encourage our kids to complete their schoolwork can make a lasting impact. Letting them do schoolwork during services may teach them that homework is more important than the Feast messages, so planning an evening or two to focus on schoolwork—when there are no scheduled Church activities—would be a better approach.

Even better, if the school allows extra days to make up assignments, is to leave the schoolbooks at home and take on the challenge of making up the work *before* or *after* the Feast. Our children then learn that being at the Feast means *being at the Feast*. Yes, that can make things harder when preparing to leave or returning home, but it's worth the memories your children will have of truly being present at the Feast. Through this, they can learn an important lesson: If we put God first, He will help us when we must do hard things—like making up a week's worth of schoolwork in much less time.

If you serve at the Feast, be extra careful not to neglect spending valuable time with the family. The Feast should not feel like a time when Mommy is *always* gone in the choir and Daddy is *always* running the sound system, so the teens *always* have to watch their siblings. Instead, help them recognize that their opportunities for service are part of something

meaningful and that God sees and rewards faithfulness. Make sure to point out when God has given your family a special blessing. If needed, ask God to help *you* see the blessings. Be *specific*—point out when the family activity everyone was looking for-

ward to goes especially well. Perhaps you planned a hike, and although the forecast called for rain, all was sunny. Or perhaps God provided a generous donation from an anonymous source, allowing your family to attend the dinner portion of the Feast dinner and dance. Make sure to point out that when we serve God and His people, He blesses us.

God's way of life comes with difficulties. As moms, let's ensure that we don't make living His way seem harder than it is. Instead, let's show our children how it has made our lives *better*. Even when trials weigh heavily on our families, we can explain to our precious children how we can count it all joy and how God never lets us down.

Teaching and showing our children right from wrong, life from death, blessing from cursing, is vital. Because one day—and that day may come sooner than you expect—they will have set before them a choice between life and death. Help them make an educated decision to choose *life*. (LN)

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Jason and Crystal Fletcher are happy to announce the birth of their second child, **Emily Leticia Fletcher**, on March 30. She weighed six pounds, eight ounces, and was 19.25 inches long. Big brother Wyatt is happy to have a little sister, and the Grand Junction, Colorado, congregation is delighted to welcome the new arrival.

Mr. and Mrs. Evan and Kyra McNair are happy to announce the birth of their second daughter, **Simone McNair**. She was born on February 25, weighing eight pounds, six ounces, and measuring 21.75 inches long. Her interests include eating, sleeping, and letting everyone know she's here. Congratulations to the happy parents and big sister Islay.

Ordinations

Mrs. Michelle Browning was ordained a deaconess on February 22 by Pastor Richard Stafford. Mrs. Browning serves in the San Antonio, Texas, congregation.

Mr. Dennis Collins was ordained an elder on October 3 by Evangelist Douglas Winnail, Pastor Joseph Brown, and Elder Ryan Dawson. Mr. Collins serves in the Sanford, Florida, congregation.

Mr. John Elliott was ordained as an elder on March 15 by Pastor Jeffrey Fall, Pastor Brandon Fall, Pastor Stephen Elliott, and Elder Michael Elliott.

Mr. Victor James was ordained a deacon on June 16, 2024, by Pastor Rajan Moses. Mr. James serves in the Johor Bahru congregation in Malaysia.

Mrs. Monica Sharver was ordained a deaconess on the First Day of Unleavened Bread by Pastor Gary Stein and Elders Marshall Moluf, Dale Bailey, David Crockett, and Felipe Torres. Mrs. Sharver serves in the Big Sandy, Texas, congregation.

Mr. Phillip Watt was ordained a deacon on March 22 by Pastors Adam West and Brent Mitchell. Mr. Watt serves in the New York City congregation.

Mr. Donald White was ordained an elder on March 1 by Pastor Keith Wheelahan and Elder Ray Joffrion. Mr. White serves in the Lafayette, Louisiana, congregation.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. Jose Luis and Carmen Delia Colón of Puerto Rico celebrated **50 years of marriage** on June 7. They were married in 1975 and have four adult children and three grandsons. Mr. and Mrs. Colón remain as in love today as when they married 50 years ago. They started attending God's Church a few months after getting married and are a great example of a marriage centered on God's way of life.

Congratulations to **Mr. and Mrs. Ian and Christine Kellett**, who celebrated their **50th wedding anniversary** on Saturday, January 11. The Brisbane, Australia, congregation honored Mr. and Mrs. Kellett with a special afternoon tea, a cake, and a small gift after services.

Mr. and Mrs. George and Juanita Schaubek celebrated **50 years of marriage** on May 14. Mr. Schaubek requested the WCG booklet *Your Marriage Can Be Happy* when he learned about the Church, and soon after he met Juanita. They have also attended the congregation in Costa Rica for 50 years. Mr. and Mrs. Schaubek have served in the ministry for 30 years, and he currently pastors four congregations in Latin America. Their love has also produced three children and three grandchildren.

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In Loving Memory

Mr. James Malcom Carrington, Jr., 95, of the St. Louis, Missouri, congregation, died February 9. Mr. Carrington was a longtime loyal member of God's Church, baptized in 1963, and he had an inexhaustible love for God's people, God's word, and old movies. He is survived and mourned by his wife, two children, four grandchildren, other relatives, and many friends. Pastor Richard Franz officiated at his memorial service.

Mrs. Reva Jane Freeze, 91, died on February 20. She is survived by her husband of 74 years, Orville. They were both baptized in April 1989 and attended the Rolla, Missouri, congregation for many years until age and health made the 240-mile round trip too difficult. Besides her husband, Mrs. Freeze is survived by three daughters, ten grandchildren, 23 great-grandchildren, three great-great-grandchildren, and many other relatives and friends who mourn her loss.

Mr. Rodger Arland Hagmaier, 83, died peacefully on March 24. Born in 1941 in Ohio, Mr. Hagmaier was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, and man of deep faith and character. He was an engineer and retired from Goodyear. Outside of work, he enjoyed flying and maintaining his own airplane, working on all things mechanical, and spending time with his beloved Church brethren. He served as an elder for more than 21 years. He and his wife were longtime Akron residents and attended that congregation for many years. However, he lived his last few years with his son in Pennsylvania. Mr. Hagmaier was preceded in death in 2019 by his cherished wife, Alene, devoted partner of 57 years, who shared his love and commitment to their family and their faith. He looked forward to seeing her again in the resurrection. He was also preceded in death by his parents, one brother, and two sisters. He is survived by one son, two grandchildren, and one great-grandson.

Mrs. Loretta Hoffpauir Morel, 88, died peacefully on April 4, surrounded by her family. Baptized in 1970, Mrs. Morel was a longtime faithful servant of God and His people and will be lovingly missed by her family as well as many brethren, especially in the Lafayette, Louisiana, congregation. In her younger years, Mrs. Morel worked as a licensed practical nurse and then dedicated herself to taking care of her family. She enjoyed many things, including sewing, crocheting, baking, cooking, and especially time with her family. She is survived by her three children, seven grandchildren, eleven great-grandchildren, four great-great-grandchildren, and many nieces and nephews. Mrs. Morel was preceded in death

by her husband of 55 years, Jan P. Morel, Sr., as well as by her sisters Beverly Sedotal and Margie Hebert.

Mrs. Connie Diane Ryan, 69, died on March 24, surrounded by loved ones. Mrs. Ryan was baptized in 2018 and was a beloved member of the Augusta, Georgia, congregation. Mrs. Ryan was a U.S. National Guard Veteran. More recently, she took care of patients with chronic disabilities and Alzheimer's disease, and she was noted for her deep compassion and consideration for their quality of life. Mrs. Ryan enjoyed traveling and spending time with family. She was preceded in death by her husband and will be dearly missed by her family and the members of the Augusta congregation.

Mr. Robert "Bob" Storrier, 94, finished his race in Milngavie, Scotland, on April 1, having spent his last years in a care home. He was predeceased by his wife. Mr. Storrier had a large personality and a deep appreciation for God's truth. He was baptized in 1966, served as a deacon for many years, and was ordained into the ministry in 1993. He also served for several years as the treasurer for the Living Church of God in the UK and taught fly fishing at the Church's teen summer camp in Loch Lomond, Scotland. He loved serving God's people. An avid football (soccer) player in his youth—even playing professionally for a brief time—Mr. Storrier never took his eyes off his spiritual goal, the Kingdom of God. Mr. Storrier was blessed with three children, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Kathleen Wollin, 86, died on March 2. Baptized in January of 1972, Mrs. Wollin was a faithful pillar in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, congregation. She and her husband, Roger, also a member of God's Church, provided rides to services for members and their families. After her husband's death in 2003 and until the last few weeks of her life, she remained active and engaged, always striving to learn, grow, and contribute. She thoroughly enjoyed spending time with the members and meeting newcomers, and she was a great friend to many and a steadfast example to all. In her early years, Kathy chose marriage over finishing college, but when Living University opened, she enrolled and was in its first graduating class. In her speech on that occasion, she shared her philosophy on life: "Do what is required of you, and then do a little more." Mrs. Wollin is survived by one daughter, one son, and one grandson, and her loss is felt by all who knew her.

“Work Out Your Own Salvation”

Warren Buffett, one of the wealthiest men in the world, is known as an astute businessman and philanthropist. His companies have thrived through the decades, yet he does not micromanage his vast, varied enterprises. It is said that he carefully chooses the person to head one of his acquired companies, lays out his goals and expectations, and then leaves that person to run the organization, usually checking on results annually.

This approach has worked very well for Mr. Buffett, as it motivates the people entrusted with these enterprises to achieve successful results, since they know that an evaluation of their performance will come. The same approach is found in a parable that Jesus Christ used to make an important spiritual point.

The story unfolds in the gospel of Luke. “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Do business [“occupy” in the *King James Version*] till I come”’ (Luke 19:12–13). In Jesus’ day, minas and talents of gold or silver represented enormous sums of money.

Later in the story, this nobleman returned and called his servants to account for the money he had entrusted to them. The first servant reported that he had earned ten times the original amount, and the master rewarded him with authority over ten cities. The second servant had earned five times the amount and was given authority over five cities. The third servant, however, admitted that he had hid the money out of fear and had done nothing with it. The master reprimanded him for his inaction, took back his mina, and gave it to the first servant (Luke 19:15–26).

The point of the parable is that Jesus Christ, represented by the nobleman, expects His servants to be productive. John, quoting Jesus, said, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (John 15:8). What kind of “fruit” was He referring to? The Great Commission that Jesus gave shortly before He ascended to Heaven gives important details: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and *make disciples* of all the nations, *baptizing them* in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all things* that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18–20).

Collectively, God’s Church has the important responsibility of carrying out this commission, yet every one of us is also individually responsible for our personal spiritual growth. The Apostle Peter put it this way: “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18). Paul also emphasized this when he wrote, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

This important principle is illustrated in the parable of the minas: “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48).

Consider the talents, abilities, and physical gifts that God has given you. Are you using them in a productive way to serve others, while growing in grace and knowledge?

—J. Davy Crockett III