

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

LCG.org

September-October 2025

Give Yourself Away

Dear Brethren,

Most of you reading this have been planning for the Feast of Tabernacles for months. You checked out where your congregation would be assigned, where else the Feast would be kept, and maybe even sites in other countries to which you might like to transfer.

But to have the best Feast experience, there is something more important. Paul tells us that Jesus taught, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). That may seem at odds with the command to spend your saved tithe to enjoy “whatever your heart desires,” such as a large juicy steak, a rack of lamb, or premium wine or similar drink. And then, for emphasis, the command is given a second time: “for whatever your heart desires” (Deuteronomy 14:26). In my immature walk with God, prior to baptism, and even for a few years afterward, my emphasis was on doing what *my* heart desired, not realizing that God intended to change my heart (Hebrews 8:10; Ezekiel 11:19–20; 36:26–27).

Respecting God While Enjoying Blessings

No, please do not misunderstand—God *does* want us to enjoy the fruits of our labor. In Judaism, the book of Ecclesiastes is traditionally read during the Feast of Tabernacles each year, and this book explains that there is a time to work and a time to rejoice in the results of that work. There is that famous passage telling us that there is “a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted... a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (Ecclesiastes 3:2, 4). A time for dancing certainly will be when God redeems and ransoms Jacob at Christ’s return, and we often read this passage during the Feast:

Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the LORD—for wheat and new wine and oil, for the young of the flock and the herd; their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all. “Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old, together; for I will turn their mourning to joy, will comfort them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow. I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the LORD” (Jeremiah 31:12–14).

King Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes of the futility of human endeavors, but he nevertheless encourages us to work—and to enjoy the rewards of our work. “Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God” (2:24).

He expresses that same sentiment in the next chapter, with a slight difference, saying that the fruit of our labor is a gift of God. “I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God” (3:12–13). Later, Solomon tells of the benefits of our labors as a heritage from God. “Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage” (5:18).

So, while we understand that the Feast of Tabernacles pictures a future time when there will be peace and pros-

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perity for all mankind during the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ, the Feast is also a time for us to celebrate our own labors. However, to have the best Feast, we must not forget that God is in the process of transforming our hearts and minds. We cannot think as we once did when we were spiritual babes.

Our nature, what Paul describes as “the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2), is constantly striving to rise to the surface, as an air-filled ball does in a body of water. You can hold it down, but it will pop to the surface any time your grip fails. That can happen if we get caught up in the things we want, forgetting the big picture. As I often say by way of reminder, the Feast is not a vacation. For some portion of our membership, time off for the Feast is the lion’s share of available time off from work or school, but it is first, foremost, and entirely God’s time that He has given us for the purpose of “learn[ing] to fear the LORD your God always” (Deuteronomy 14:23).

What does the fear of God mean? Certainly, as a child fears his father when he has misbehaved and is being confronted with the consequence of his rebellion, we ought to fear God in a similar manner if we turn away from Him. However, that is not the kind of fear being described here if we have the Spirit of Christ in us. The context is of respecting God—holding Him in highest esteem. As we individually and collectively study His word and practice outgoing concern, we learn about His Way and the wisdom of it. We learn about His character and how He thinks.

Every Blessing Is a Test

An unconverted person could also attend the Feast to eat and drink to his heart’s content, but God expects more of us than filling our stomachs. Jesus instructs us, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:12–14). This is a reflection of how God thinks, and we are to learn His ways.

Is this not what He Himself does in calling us to the marriage supper? Who else does Paul say that He calls but the weak, the foolish, the base, and the despised of this world (1 Corinthians 1:26–29)? It is true that God has another motive—that no flesh should glory in His presence—but is there not also a broader message here about how He thinks?

The third Festival season is a time for celebration. For those in the Northern Hemisphere, summer has come to an end and many of the crops are in. It is a time to indulge in the fruits of our labors, but not in a selfish way. God gives us more abundance at the Feast than we have during the rest of the year, but we must not forget everything we are learning throughout the year.

He makes us just a little rich for the Feast to see what we will do under that circumstance. It is easy to think of all that we want—to see exciting new places, to take the children to Disneyland, to enjoy an ocean cruise, or to spend time with family and close friends. However, the Feast is much more than that. It is a time to rejoice by giving, sharing with those who have less, and bringing comfort to the lonely (Nehemiah 8:9–12).

Yes, God intends for us to enjoy the fruits of our labor, as He instructs us:

Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works. Let your garments always be white, and let your head lack no oil. Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun (Ecclesiastes 9:7–9).

However, we must never forget the words of our Savior: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). So, to have the best Feast ever, enjoy the blessings God gives you, and give yourself away!



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The Living Church News is published every two months by the Living Church of God, 2301 Crown Centre Drive, Charlotte, NC 28227. Subscriptions are sent without charge to members of the Living Church of God.

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Postmaster: Send address changes to
***The Living Church News* • P.O. Box 3810 Charlotte, NC 28227**

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Dangers of Being a Sophomore

Most people rightly understand that the word *sophomore* refers to a second-year student in high school or university, but how many know the word's derivation? It comes from two Greek words: *sophos*, meaning *wise*, and *moros*, meaning *foolish*.

So, why is a second-year student called a wise fool? And what does that have to do with us?

When encountering a new environment, the average person holds back, stays out of the limelight, takes in what is happening, and fits in accordingly. This behavior begins at an early age and normally continues through life. Whether it's your first year in the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, high school, or the workplace, you know when you begin that everyone else has more experience and knowledge of how things work. Only in the course of time do you become part of the establishment to help initiate later newcomers. Second-year students—now sophomores—know a little, are eager to teach others, and don't shy away from explaining the rules and what they know. This trait of human nature makes them feel good and important. You have likely seen a sophomore at work and have most likely played the sophomore role at some time in your life.

You probably remember what it was like when you first set foot in the Church of God. Everything was new, it was different, and you may have thought—as many of us did—that all the members were perfect. But we knew that we were not, and it usually did not take too long to realize that others were also imperfect. In time we were no longer freshmen, but new members of the establishment. We knew the ropes. We could answer questions from newcomers: “How do you keep the Feast? How can you afford to travel and stay in rented housing for eight days? What do you do all that time?” And there were many more questions coming our way. Yes, we graduated to the “sophomore class”—sometimes with more enthusiasm than wisdom.

Sophomoric Serving

Many decades ago, the Church designated men serving on “security” at the Feast of Tabernacles with armbands or other insignia to indicate their role. However, experience came to show that when you tell men they are on “Security,” some will turn into a Barney Fife, the officious and

bumbling deputy sheriff on *The Andy Griffith Show*, a role played by Don Knotts. Barney was always eager to wield his importance in the small, rural town of Mayberry, which was mostly void of crime and criminals other than the harmless town drunk.

Because we saw men taking “security” to mean more than what we intended, some Feast Coordinators, instead of designating men as *Security*, selected *ushers* to watch the stage, back doors, or other places where trouble might arise. It is amazing how words can make a difference in how men see themselves!

In the early 1990s, when God used Dr. Roderick C. Meredith to continue His Work and lead the way out of the apostatizing Worldwide Church of God, many small congregations sprang up with no deacon or minister to serve them on a regular basis. Sermon tapes were sent to feed these in-home groups, and we referred to a person who opened his or her home to others to play a recorded sermon as the “host.” This made sense because that was truly what they were. Nevertheless, the term *host* became an exalted designation to some who had never before been given what they wrongly perceived as grandiose authority! Too many saw the term as conferring ordination status—which it did not. Some hosts took their responsibility to include correcting their guests. Others were offended when a deacon or elder came out of the apostasy later than they did and was given the oversight that they had presumed they held over the small group. Sadly, not a few of these hosts—these “sophomores”—failed the test and fell away. This is why I did everything I could while overseeing the Work in Canada to drive a stake into the heart of the term *host* by changing it to *video recipient*. Again, words do make a difference!

The sophomore inclination did not stop with hosts. It also affected some deacons and elders who were suddenly in positions of seemingly greater “independence” than they'd had previously. A few began teaching pet doctrines they may have held for years but were never allowed to promote. When given more autonomy, they failed the loyalty test. If you were a host, deacon, or elder in those days and have served humbly, faithfully, and steadfastly, we appreciate your service and example—and it does not go unnoticed by God Himself.

Few of you are in high school or college—and, if you are, you may not be in your second year. And most of you

have passed the figurative second-year sophomore stage in the Church. So, what does this have to do with you?

“My” Kingdom Come?

The Feast of Trumpets pictures the Day of the Lord—seven trumpets—the climax of which is the return of Jesus Christ and our birth into the Family of God. No longer will we sin, feel pain, or wonder whether we will “make it.” Of course, God does not want us to walk in fear or doubt, but we should all know that we must remain faithful *to the end*. We will rejoice when Satan, the one who currently directs the course of this world, is removed and, for a thousand years, will be prevented from deceiving people. We know this from the Day of Atonement. Then the Feast of Tabernacles pictures the coming period of peace and prosperity for all humanity during the time we call the Millennium. After that comes the Last Great Day, depicting the time when all our currently deceived friends and relatives will be given their opportunity for salvation. Oh, how we look forward to each of these events in God’s plan!

It is important to remember that the Millennium is not the Kingdom of God. Flesh and blood cannot inherit that kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:50, 53). We must be born into it (John 3:3). The Millennium, as much as we look forward to it, is merely a period of time when that ruling Family of God reigns over mankind for what will be a blink of time in eternity.

After that, God’s one great Family will interact in ways that we now can only imagine. It will not be a celestial, drug-induced trip, nor an eternity of staring into the face of God (the so-called “beatific vision”). We will no doubt be creatively productive, accomplishing great feats. Of course, it will be joyous beyond what we can currently know. “You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

Much discussion takes place regarding this seventh-month Festival season. Some want to know exactly when Christ will return and usher in the Kingdom of God. Those of Jesus’ day had the same question (Matthew 24:3; Luke 17:20; 19:11; Acts 1:6). We also speculate greatly on what the Millennium will be like. Scripture gives us some clues, but not a complete picture. Children want to know whether they will have a lion or a bear for a pet (if we were to take a poll, lions would likely win). Some want to know whether God will resurrect their dog, cat, parrot, or ferret to be with them for eternity. Some speculate, even declare as if they know, that there will be no modern vehicles in the Millennium—only horses, buggies, bicycles, and rickshaws. Others speculate just as vociferously that there will be planes, trains, and automobiles.

Then we hear such pronouncements as, “In my kingdom....” You can fill in the blank. Ah, but are not such pro-

nouncements a tad bit sophomoric—or, we might even say, wrong-headed? After all, is it “My kingdom?” Is it “My city?” Or is it *God’s* kingdom with *God’s* cities?

It is one thing to speculate, but another to miss the mark when it comes to fundamentals. None of us know for sure the kind of clothing people will wear after Christ’s return. None of us know to what degree there will be mining and industry. Yes, we do know that God is not against digging metals out of the ground. He put them there for the benefit of His people Israel and, by extension, for mankind in general. “For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land... a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper” (Deuteronomy 8:7, 9). But to what degree mankind will dig copper and iron out of the ground remains to be seen. What about coal, oil, and natural gas, which are also ready sources of energy that can be used to smelt these metals from ore?

We can speculate, and it is profitable to explore what the Millennium might look like—what innovations there may be to solve the problems we see today. We surely will not see the kind of pollution there is now. Yet, at the same time, dealing with human and animal pollution is a fact of life on this planet. How will sewage be handled? Will we all be given a shovel? Somehow, I doubt that—but, if so, opening a shovel store will be good business for those enjoying physical life in the Millennium, considering the billions of human beings who will be around by the end of those thousand years. And let us not forget the Great White Throne Judgment!

Yes, it is fun to speculate, realizing that speculation is merely that, unless it has scriptural backing. But again, we must realize that it will not be *your* kingdom and they will not be *your* cities—or mine. Yes, we will be given rule to one degree or another, but it will always be with the realization that it is *God’s* Kingdom.

Jesus’ Example

One lesson often brought out during the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread is that Jesus did not come to Earth to do what was right in His own eyes. He said, “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30). And He confirmed, “I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).

This is remarkable when you consider who Jesus was and what His role was in creating the universe, angelic life, and all life on this planet. “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.

All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16). And we are told in Hebrews 1:2 that it was through Christ that the Father “made the worlds.”

When the mother of James and John came to Jesus with her two grown sons and requested that one would sit on His right hand and the other on His left in His kingdom, we know that Jesus was not taking a pass by using His Father as an excuse when He said that “to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father” (Matthew 20:23). Again, this is remarkable when you consider that Christ is given the Kingdom. He understood what had been delegated to Him, what had been revealed, and what was not His decision to make. When Peter pointed out that he and his fellow disciples had left everything behind and wanted to know what was in it for them, Jesus answered, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28).

Jesus was not self-willed. His whole purpose was to do the will of the One who had sent Him. We see this from a passage that we in the Living Church of God often quote: “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work’” (John 4:34). We see it also in His prayer leading up to the crucifixion, when the trial ahead weighed heavily upon Him. Three times He cried out, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

Willingness to submit our will to that of God’s is esteemed above all else. Israel’s first human king, Saul, was rejected because he was presumptuous, self-willed, and disobedient. God then called David to be king, because “the LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), one “who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22). This humble character trait is why David will be king over all Israel in the near future (Hosea 3:5).

My Kingdom or Thy Kingdom?

The degree to which each of us will be expected to make decisions on our own will be interesting to see. God has made us free moral agents and expects us to make decisions. He does not dictate to us which clothes to put on in the morning, though He does give us principles of modesty and wearing appropriate clothing for the occasion. He gives us great latitude in what we can eat, yet at the same time puts limits on what kind of meats to consume, commands moderation in the use of alcohol, and warns us against gluttony.

Likewise, it is safe to assume that not every city during the Millennium will be constructed exactly alike. Christ will no doubt expect us to make wise and righteous decisions,

just as He had to make wise decisions as to who would be His Apostles. In this we find an important principle. Jesus tells us that He was the One who chose the Twelve to be Apostles (Luke 6:13). We also read that Jesus told His Apostles, “You did not choose Me, but *I chose you and appointed you* that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (John 15:16).

That was a choice Jesus was given to make, but there were certain parameters. The Apostles had to be within the scope of those whom His Father drew to Him (John 6:44, 65). This is also stated in Jesus’ prayer in John 17. We also learn that He did not “go it alone” when making these decisions. He spent all night in prayer to His Father (Luke 6:12–13) before making such momentous decisions regarding who would be witnesses of Him and who would lead each of the twelve tribes of Israel under King David in the Millennium—and perhaps for all eternity!

It is easy to speculate “in my kingdom,” but we must be careful about presumptuous sins. David made many mistakes, including terrible mistakes in the matter of Uriah. God forgave him, but that did not mean there was no price to pay for his transgressions. The penalties David suffered were horrific. The child born from his adultery died, his own son rose up against him, and many of his wives were defiled openly. However, the full penalty of his sins is forgiven through the blood of Christ, and God looks at the heart. God knew this was an aberration—that David was profoundly repentant and was truly a man who sought His heart. One of David’s psalms makes this request: “Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression” (Psalm 19:13).

God will have no independent members of His Family who act presumptuously and are self-willed. When we enter His Kingdom and are given cities or other responsibilities, perhaps we will all feel like freshmen, newcomers. But what happens later? Will we be as wise fools? Will we be as hosts acting like evangelists? Will we decide on our own what our cities will be like? Will it be “*my*” kingdom or “*Thy*” kingdom? Will we first and foremost look to God, understanding what is within our authority and what is not? And even with what is within our authority, will we seek to do it *God’s way* or *our own way*?

God must know before our change whether we have holy and righteous character. Again, He will have no independent members in His Family—no more Lucifers—no matter how smart or talented. Let us not think in terms of “my kingdom,” or “my cities.” Let us consider these things as we rightly and enjoyably speculate about the future during the coming Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day! (LN)



In the Midst of the Millennium

By **Jonathan McNair**

As we keep the upcoming Feast of Tabernacles, we will look ahead to the prophesied Millennium—and, as we keep the Last Great Day, we may look back at the Millennium from the perspective of the White Throne Judgment that will come afterward. But what lessons can we glean from an additional perspective? In this article, we'll strive to picture the Millennium from within—from something like the halfway point, after the turmoil of the Great Tribulation is long past, but before Satan is briefly released from his captivity.

Zechariah gives us a vivid picture of the Millennium. We read, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing’” (Zechariah 8:4–5). Old men, old women, and children in the midst of the Millennium—the picture will be prevalent in our cities, as generations of children will have been born by 500 years after Christ's return. There will be happy families, happy people, and successful nations.

At that point in the Millennium, we'll be right in the middle of fulfilling the purpose of this millennial Sabbath rest. Let's remember that, for the first couple hundred years of the Millennium, we will have been helping Christ reign over a world still recovering from the traumatic 6,000 years of Satan's rule.

As long as there are human beings who knew others—parents or grandparents, perhaps—who lived through the Great Tribulation, there will be a sense of great relief, and it should be very hard for people to become spiritually complacent. People will be glad to honor God, remember Him, commune with Him, and focus on Him as Creator and Sustainer. Every weekly Sabbath rest will be a reminder that they are living in the wonderful seventh millennium of His plan for mankind.

But what is the purpose of a rest? It isn't an end in itself. The Millennium will be a rest and a joyous blessing, but it will also be a time of purposeful activity. Let's picture our part in that activity.

Setting the Scene

Isaiah paints a vivid picture of the Millennium as a time of regathering. Those who have been trampled under the feet of their enemies will be gathered together in safety. Israel will again take the lead, physically speaking, in this world to come:

The LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt; with His mighty wind He will shake His fist over the River [the Euphrates], and strike it in the seven streams, and make men cross over dry-shod. There will be a highway for the remnant of His people who will be left from Assyria, as it was for Israel in the day that he came up from the land of Egypt (Isaiah 11:15–16).

We should note that this prophecy is very much future; it has not yet taken place. Those who do not understand our prophesied future cannot explain this scripture. And where will you and I be, as firstfruits, during this time? We read, “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:15–16).

Christians who lived and died in this age will be alive again, born into the God Family in all their vibrancy—not in their struggles, sufferings, sickness, and weakness. He says, “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (vv. 17–18).

Elsewhere, Paul writes, “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9). Every seventh day of the week, we enjoy a rest pictured by a Sabbath day that goes all the way back to Creation, yet also pictures something far beyond, in the future. We know that the weekly Sabbath is a foreshadowing of what we might call a macro-Sabbath, the Millennium—the thousand-year time when the weekly Sabbath will picture what will then be the present reality. And it will be a glorious time in human history.

Stability and Prosperity

What will that time be like? We read, “The LORD is exalted, for He dwells on high; He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness. Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, and the strength of salvation; the fear of the LORD is His treasure” (Isaiah 33:5–6).

In our present age, our world desperately needs wisdom, knowledge, and stability. Stability is something we’re lacking governmentally, politically, and economically. If you had to pick just one word to describe our nations, that word could very well be *instability*. So, what can we say about the wisdom and knowledge that will give the Millennial world the stability we now lack?

One of the first characteristics that will provide that stability can be called *the economics of faith*. And it is very different from any of the world’s systems today. How? Think back to the last time we faced a shortage of some basic item that we all need—maybe toilet paper, or hand sanitizer, or eggs. Money is chasing goods, and this dictates prices. In man’s economic system, limited resources lead to price wars, and those with the greatest need for resources are often the least able to afford them.

Expectation of scarcity is what drives our system. It drives prices—if you expect a high price for a bushel of wheat, what do you do? You plant more, and the more you plant, the less money you get, because everybody’s planting more. Our system is based on supply and demand, and we can think, *Oh, that’s perfect*. Yet is it perfect? Has our system provided prosperity for everyone? No—but we almost can’t see any other way. We might say, *Well, supply and demand— isn’t that just normal?*

It may be normal, but that doesn’t make it biblical. Consider God’s system, which is not based on mankind’s laws of scarcity, of supply and demand. When God provided manna for the Israelites, He promised, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily” (Exodus 16:4–5).

We see how God was going to deliver manna to them. “And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, ‘What is it?’ For they did not know what it was” (vv. 14–15). We find a perfect system of timely and sufficient delivery here. “Let every man gather it according to each one’s need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent” (v. 16). This certainly involved human faithfulness—they had to obey, to go out and work, certainly enough for themselves, for their family, and for others in need.

Manna provided them with what they needed—for the day, because what happened if they tried to go out and store more? We read, “So when they measured it by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one’s need. And Moses said, ‘Let no one leave any of it till morning.’ Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses. But some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank” (vv. 18–20). They were forced to rely on God’s providence every day. They gathered what they needed, and it indeed supplied all their needs, even for the Sabbath day when they weren’t to gather.

This is the first principle of the nuts and bolts of God’s system: *the economics of faith*. We will be responsible for teaching people to live according to this way, not to hoard or gouge or exploit.

Homeland as Capital

Another key principle of God’s economics is *the economics of land as capital*. Notice God’s description of the division of the land of Canaan:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names. To a large tribe you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a smaller inheritance. Each shall be given its inheritance according to those who were numbered of them. But the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. According to the lot their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller” (Numbers 26:52–56).

The fundamental principle here is that the land ultimately belongs to God, who can give it as He wishes. And He placed it in the care of families *as a heritage*—not like the Oklahoma Land Rush, with somebody shooting a gun and thousands of people in buckboards and on horses racing across the land to try to stake their claim and then fight off other people who want the same property, only to have somebody else come along and steal it. It’s not “every man for himself.”

And God gives some specifics as to exactly how the land is to be cared for. Consider the principle of the seventh-year land sabbath. We read, “Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the LORD. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard” (Leviticus 25:3–4).

Yes, there’s a physical aspect to resting the land instead of soaking it with man-made chemicals to squeeze out maxi-

mum production, increasing the yield while ruining the soil. But it's also tied to an economic principle that is very unlike what we see in the world today: "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the LORD's release" (Deuteronomy 15:1–2).

Recent studies have shown that wealth disparity in the United States has escalated over the last 45 years. In 1979, the top tenth of a percent of America's wealthy owned about 7 percent of the nation's wealth. Today, that share has roughly doubled, to around 14 percent. **The top 1 percent now controls nearly a third of all U.S. wealth—almost as much as the entire bottom 90 percent of Americans.**

Can you imagine what this principle would do to our nations if we implemented it today? Our system is built on debts, credit, and interest. God's system would destroy that system. Think about your mindset when you loan money if you have the understanding that it will be forgiven at a certain point in the future. It changes everything, doesn't it?

Consider: "Of a foreigner you may require it, but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother" (v. 3). Why is that? Because God was not going to allow foreigners, who lived by their own laws, to come in and "borrow" money that they could get away with never paying back. People were to treat each other mercifully and help each other.

The Economics of Jubilee

Let's add another layer to this, the Jubilee year: "And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession" (Leviticus 25:10). The word translated here as "possession" has to do with ancestral heritage. What a blessing to have a generational home. Today, if you live on property that your parents lived on, it's quite an anomaly. But in years gone by, for much of history before the industrial revolution, it was the norm for property to be held for generations. When you planted a tree, your grandchildren would benefit.

Today, we're not attached to the land. We're not attached to specific places. As part of our system after the industrial revolution, we're used to labor being like pawns on a chess board, moved around to where the work is. But God

intended mankind to be attached to the land and for the *capital* to be the land—not in a bank somewhere, or in Bitcoin, or in stocks and bonds that can lose their value in a fraction of a second.

Oh, but we're so much more sophisticated, some would respond. Are we? Recent studies have shown that wealth disparity in the United States has escalated over the last 45 years. In 1979, the top tenth of a percent of America's wealthy owned about 7 percent of the nation's wealth. Today, that share has roughly doubled, to around 14 percent. The top 1 percent now controls nearly a third of all U.S. wealth—almost as much as the entire bottom 90 percent of Americans. And what about those who seek higher education? About 43 million Americans now carry student debt, amounting to more than \$1.7 trillion. It shouldn't be hard to see that this present economic system is far from God's way.

It may be instructive to look at this through the economic principle known as the Kondratiev wave, named for a professor in the Soviet Union whose execution was ordered by dictator Josef Stalin in 1938 because he foresaw that the U.S. economy would recover from the Great Depression. The Kondratiev wave shows that our economic history has followed what have basically been 50-year cycles that bottom out in a redistribution of wealth—sometimes through an internal upheaval or revolution, other times through war with neighboring countries. Somehow, about every 50 years, everything turns over economically.

Interestingly, if you look at where the U.S. is now in the wave that has been charted for the past 200 years, it should be coming out of that wave right about now, and we might wonder if that means America has more years left. Yet we see its economy rotting from the inside out and the oppressiveness of debt and financial ruin. Indeed, we see from prophecy that there will be an entity that rises from the next total collapse, and that entity will achieve economic greatness right before the end of this age—but it's not the U.S., it's not Great Britain, and it's not Israel. And it's all because we've rejected God's way, which treats land as the fundamental capital that underlies His economic system.

Godly Business Ethics

A third principle of the system that Christ will establish in the Millennium involves what we can call *the economics of godly business ethics*. This is a rather large piece of the picture that involves a number of different components, but there is one in particular that you may not have noticed.

We see in Numbers 35:1–8 that the Levites received 48 towns, each of which was surrounded by open land that was

2,000 cubits wide. It's a fascinating pattern, with pastureland that was used by everyone—and all kinds of regulations, even regarding the size. Even that size has implications, because what we see as cities grow larger is that there are benefits that are accrued until a certain point. The economist E.F. Schumacher in 1973 published a book titled *Small Is Beautiful*, in which he described the optimal size of cities. He found that as cities get bigger, the effort required to keep roads and services from deteriorating is economically more than can be sustained. Constant growth creates logistical problems that become economic problems, requiring increased taxes to support decreasing services. In this regard, it's interesting to note that, in Numbers 35, God established that the Levites' inheritance of cities would be a fixed amount and no more.

And the Levites played a key role in resolving controversies. We read, "Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of the LORD; by their word every controversy and every assault shall be settled" (Deuteronomy 21:5).

Why does this matter? The Levites, tasked with making these decisions that involved disputes over money and property, had nothing to gain for themselves when making their decisions. How different from what we see today, and indeed in most of human history, where the people who make the decisions are often the ones who can gain the most from those decisions—unlike the Levites, who were not allowed to accumulate land and wealth.

Prosperity and Complacency

God's system works—and it will bring prosperity the world has not yet seen. But, as memory of Satan's world recedes from the collective mind of mankind, will complacency set in? History gives us amazing stories of how easily mankind can forget God in the midst of blessings. We think of Adam and Eve, of course, and of the Israelites in the midst of the Exodus. But even in our generation, we see how the complacency of God's Church led to apostasy after Mr. Herbert Armstrong's death.

As a result, even while we are teaching God's way and the people of the Millennium are experiencing amazing blessings, we'll also be preaching a warning, because we know the end of the story. We know that Satan will be released for a brief time at the end of the Millennium, and we know that while he won't topple God's system, he will find enough rebellious interest to cause great suffering for a short time for those whom he deceives. We read, "Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea" (Revelation 20:7–8).

So, as we pass that halfway mark and we're in the latter 500-or-so years of the Millennium, a big part of what we will be doing will be saying, *Folks, listen! Don't forget where this all came from! This established system that we all enjoy so much can be destroyed for you—by a spirit being who is more influential than you can imagine!*

The lesson is that a system of government only brings prosperity and peace if the hand of God is in that system. And while you are prospering under a system, you shouldn't think it's because of your own skill or goodness. One of the great lessons that those who prosper in the Millennium will need to internalize is that the glory must go to God, for He is the one who will have done all that we've described in this article.

Preparing for the White Throne Judgment

As we find ourselves in the midst of the Millennium, we will need to remind human beings everywhere that God is the source of their prosperity—and that they are, in fact, prospering for a divine purpose. This brings us back to the question at the beginning of this article: *What is the ultimate purpose of the Millennial Sabbath rest?*

The answer is simple: to prepare for the next phase in God's plan. That's the way God works—He builds to the next phase. And we're going to need lots and *lots* of help—human and angelic, as well as divine—for the next phase of God's plan. We're going to need to train a lot of people to help deal with that final episode of mankind, the White Throne Judgment, pictured by the Last Great Day.

Estimates suggest that around 100 billion people have lived and died over the course of human history. We don't know exactly how God will distribute the workload, but it seems clear that however many Spirit-being are serving under Jesus Christ at that time, they will be far outnumbered by the human beings who come up in the second resurrection. One way or another, it will be a big task. And we will have spent the years of the Millennium preparing for that task.

Yes, the Millennium will relieve planet Earth from a time of great devastation at the end of this present age of Satan's rule. And it will usher in the White Throne Judgment that will bring most of humanity its first opportunity to learn God's way and receive salvation. But between those great events, as we are in the thick of things in the midst of the Millennium, each year will be a time of doing.

We will be teaching human beings the Way that we learned and practiced ourselves in this life. Together, we will be preparing for the next step in God's plan, the White Throne Judgment—and there will be a sense of urgency as we prepare. Let us have that same sense of urgency even now, knowing that we are preparing to help literally billions of people learn and practice God's way. Let's not become complacent as we prepare for our part in that wonderful time to come! (L)



You Can Do This!

By **Phil Sena**

I'm sure that most of us know the words of Revelation 20:6 very well: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." This one verse reveals so much about our destiny. Let's break it down.

"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection." What an understatement that is! Imagine the exhilaration we will feel as we rise in the air to meet Christ—as we realize we *actually made it* and that the struggle was worth it. As it says, we will be not only blessed but also made holy through the change from flesh to Spirit, which means we will be pure, perfected, and consecrated.

"Over such the second death has no power." We know from Hebrews 9:27 that it's appointed for all men to die once—that is part of the cycle of life in the flesh. But those in the first resurrection don't need to worry about the second death, which is for those who will be cast into the Lake of Fire after rejecting their full opportunity to choose God's way of life. Those in the first resurrection are in no danger of the second death—they will have received eternal life. They will live forever from that point forward.

If the verse ended right there, we could assume that, having achieved the goal, those in the first resurrection could just relax and bask in the glory of being in the Family of God, perhaps high-fiving each other and comparing notes with fellow victors. But the verse *doesn't* end right there. It goes on to say that "they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."

So, forget sitting by a beach with a piña colada in your hand during the Millennium. This says that those in the first resurrection will be given jobs, and not just any jobs—they will be *kings* and *priests*. There are many articles and sermons available at LCG.org that address being a king, but this article will focus exclusively on our destiny to be priests of God and of Christ—because I'm sure there are many who have doubts about their ability to do that job. Each of us can likely come up with all sorts of reasons why we are unfit to be a priest. But if we take this verse at its word, there will be no exceptions.

It doesn't say that *some* or *many* will be priests of God and of Christ; it implies that *all* those who are raised to eternal life in the first resurrection will be priests.

The good news is that God will play a major part in your success as a priest. Before you even start the job, God will make three specific changes that are going to make all the difference. So, let's examine your future role as a priest of the Father and of Christ, first by seeing what God is going to do to make the job easier. Then, let's look at what important aspects *you* will bring to your role as priest—because no matter your background and imperfections, you *can* be a priest of God. With the combination of what God will do and what you bring to the table, you can do this!

The World Will Be Rebooted

God is going to reboot this world by establishing His Kingdom when Jesus Christ returns. The key word here is *reboot*, because, let's face it, there are so many issues in society that will never be fixed through human effort—no matter how much time people are given. That is why backing any of mankind's causes is ultimately futile.

Many of our world's divisive issues are driven by anger, which will increase until we come to the point described in a passage that's very familiar to us. "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved" (Matthew 24:21–22). But we know those days *will* be shortened "for the elect's sake." This tells us that the *inevitable* conclusion of man's self-rule is his own destruction. Even if man were given another 6,000 years, the result would be the same. But we didn't come to this point overnight. The major societal issues we see today are the result of thousands of years of this self-rule. We are witnessing the cumulative effect of mankind doing what is "right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25). And, as we often hear during the Feast of Trumpets, these days will be shortened by one event: the return of Jesus Christ.

This event will be like a *hard* reboot, which is what you call restarting an electronic device when it's not working properly. Whether it's a smartphone, a computer, or a tablet,

it undergoes a hard reboot when you manually restart it. Restarting is one of the most effective methods to try when troubleshooting problems with electronics. Sometimes, it even requires pulling the plug out of the wall outlet and plugging it back in!

It's interesting that God used a reboot once before, with the great flood of Noah's day—but that was more like a *soft* reboot. It didn't take long at all for mankind to return to the same destructive path as before. The flood only delayed the inevitable result that we read about in Matthew 24. But Jesus Christ's return will be a *hard* reboot—a pulling of the plug—because, at that point, only a hard reboot will be able to clear out the mess the world is in.

In the visions God gave him, the Apostle John describes that dramatic change:

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:11–16).

The glorified Christ will arrive with authority to put down all rebellion, and that act alone will bring the most monumental shift in the history of the world: The Kingdom of God will be established on this earth. And this will be a *permanent* change—not like the flood, after which the world quickly began to fall back to the way it was before. We read that “in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44).

The Saints Will Be Changed to Spirit

This act of a hard reboot will have *major* societal consequences, but *our* change will be the most significant personal change imaginable. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will

sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51–52).

There's no way for us to comprehend how significant this change will be, but Jesus gave us a hint, saying that “the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43). To shine forth as the sun is a pretty significant change! When He adds us to His Family, God will give us abilities far beyond what even the angels have ever had.

Satan Will Be Removed

But, just as importantly, God will also *remove* something—or, rather, someone. He will put away the enemy—Satan, the Devil—as pictured by the Day of Atonement. We read the following:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while (Revelation 20:1–3).

It's currently impossible for us to comprehend what a difference this will make, because we've never experienced even a second of our lives without Satan's influence. But this act alone will eventually change the prevailing mood over *all the world*—removing the pervasive spirit of rebellion against authority, particularly against God. This change of atmosphere won't happen immediately after Satan is put away, but there will gradually be less and less of that rebellious nature permeating society, which will make people more receptive to God's way:

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2–3).

A reeducation process will begin, and the law and word of the Lord will be the foundation of education in the Millennium. People will be *receptive*; they will *want* to learn. One

of the most important aspects of successful teaching—and of success as a priest—is the students’ willingness to be taught. And during the Millennium, the people will have that willingness! Today, when you try to teach people whose minds God has not opened, you face resistance. It’s going to be different then, when every human mind in the world will be opened!

When we think about our future role as priests, we need to understand the difference that the changed society will make. Through monumental acts—a hard societal reboot, the saints’ change to Spirit at the first resurrection, and the removal of Satan—God will put us in a position to succeed as priests.

The Role of a Priest

But let’s turn our attention to what *we* will bring to the table in our role as priests of the Father and Jesus Christ during

Everything we go through in life is valuable, because we don’t know how something we’ve experienced will be useful to someone in the future during a time of need. **If you’ve known the struggle of overcoming a weakness, you can help in a way someone who hasn’t struggled cannot. It will all work together for good.**

the Millennium. Most of you, if you were told today that you were going to be ordained into the ministry, would want to run at a thousand miles per hour in the opposite direction. A lot of that reaction is because many expect perfection from the ministry, which is why ministers are often judged harshly for any personal failings or perceived hypocrisy. But while the role of a minister is necessary and God-ordained, *none* of us are perfect.

Additionally, many expect ministers to know *everything* about the things of God. Who would want to live under the weight of such expectation? Most do not. This view of the ministry surely affects the common view of being a priest, which can also sound like a very intimidating job. When most hear about being priests, they think something like, *I can’t do that. I am in no way equipped or qualified to handle that.*

But it helps to have the responsibility defined the way Lesson 16 of the *Tomorrow’s World Bible Study Course* describes it: “Priests are responsible for teaching God’s way of life—making the way of salvation clear and easy to understand” (“Destined to be Kings and Priests”). This description of the priest’s role immediately makes it seem much more manageable and less intimidating. Most brethren already do

this with their family members—or at work, at school, or in other situations where one strives to make the way of God clear and easy to understand.

To help the role of priest seem even less intimidating, note what God Himself says about the job of a priest: “They shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean” (Ezekiel 44:23). This boils the role of a priest down to its essential part: teaching the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. I hope we all have a pretty good idea of what that difference is! *You can do this* because, ever since God called you, you’ve been learning that difference—not perfectly, but as you grow God is continually adding to your store of knowledge and understanding of His law and how to apply it to life.

Once people are taught the difference between right and wrong, they learn to further discern between them by putting that knowledge into practice. And this is what we’re all learning now—perhaps hundreds of times a day—in the many decisions we face in our everyday lives. *What should I do with my time? Should I click on this link? Should I watch this show? Should I listen to this music? Should I dwell on this thought?* All the decisions that we must make every day of our lives involve our discerning between good and evil, what is right and what is wrong. This is what spiritual maturity is all about—and we’re learning it on the job, every day.

Scripture tells us that “solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:14, *English Standard Version*). We’re doing this all the time, every day of our lives, through those hundreds—perhaps thousands—of big and small decisions we must make as the people of God.

Our Invaluable Experience

Lesson 16 of the *Bible Study Course* also says that “mankind’s problems are in large part caused by the inability to distinguish between what is proper and what is not.” There’s a veil over the people of this world, and there are so many ungodly influences that Satan uses to confuse them. And we would be just as much in the dark if it weren’t for God opening our minds. We’re plugging into God’s word and learning how to implement it daily—that’s the difference. We learn from experience that whenever we choose wrong over right—which we sometimes do, and sometimes with full knowledge that it’s wrong—we suffer the consequences. Many of us know this fact all too well.

Perhaps our circumstances today are the result of a series of bad decisions we've made. In fact, some may believe that they've made so many serious mistakes that there is no way they could ever be priests of God—that they've disqualified themselves from having that role. But we need to consider that one of the most important aspects we'll bring to our roles as priests in the Millennium is our *experience*—what we're experiencing *now* in life. That means the *full range* of what we learn in this life, both the good and the bad. The totality of our human experience is valuable for teaching those who will be living during the Millennium. *None* of it is wasted.

When we know that we need to change, we *need* to change. We need to *repent*—and, as we know, our repentance doesn't remove the consequences of our bad decisions. But God can even work with those. Lesson 16 of the *Bible Study Course* says, "True disciples of Jesus Christ are being prepared, through lessons learned and character built in this lifetime, to *rule on earth* in God's Kingdom as *kings and priests*." That brings such an important perspective on exactly how all the lessons we learn, easy and hard, fit together into our roles as priests of God.

Most of us would probably think that being an expert in God's law is what will make a good priest of the Father and of Christ—that we have to memorize book, chapter, and verse of every scripture, being able to explain everything about God's law. Knowledge of God's law will absolutely be necessary, but it is our *experience* that includes what we've learned about *applying* God's law, to the point where no one can gainsay what we've learned; we know, from our own experience, the benefits of keeping God's law and the consequences of breaking it, and no one can tell us otherwise. That is *invaluable* for teaching people. Look at the Pharisees: They knew God's law inside and out, but that didn't make them good spiritual guides!

This practical experience of continually trying to apply God's law in everyday life will make us effective priests. Because we've been there, who better to help teach, "This is the way; walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21)? This is also why Jesus Christ is the perfect High Priest for us; He came down to this earth as flesh and blood to experience what we are experiencing, to go through it Himself.

One of the most encouraging verses in the New Testament tells us that "we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus made all the right decisions, but because He had that experience of deciding and can relate to us through it, we can "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (v. 16). That's our High Priest—and we will be priests of God for the people of the Mil-

lennium. Because we'll have been there, as Christ was, we will be able to relate to their struggles as Jesus does to ours. We will have compassion and empathy toward those learning in the Millennium—because of our experience now.

Nothing Wasted

As a minister, I've heard people say that they think their lives are a waste and that they have nothing to offer. But everything we go through in this life is valuable; none of it is wasted, because we don't know how something we've experienced will be useful to someone in the future during a time of need. If you've known the struggle of overcoming a weakness, you can help in a way someone who hasn't struggled cannot. It will *all* work together for good (Romans 8:28).

For example, many in God's Church have experienced terrible trauma—either trauma that was inflicted on them or trauma that they brought upon themselves. Who better to help those who have gone through the trauma of the Day of the Lord than those who have experienced personal trauma in this life? Who better to comfort these people? If you have experienced trauma, know that when you are serving in the Millennium as a Spirit-born priest, you will be specifically suited to comfort those people who will have gone through the worst trauma in history.

The Apostle Paul talks about our obligation to pay God's comfort forward. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

Many in God's Church who have been through trauma have also been comforted by God in many ways, to the point where they now have a sense of peace and perspective. These verses tell us that we are also able to share comfort with others—and this will be *especially* true when we are priests. There are *many* experiences that God's future priests have had in this life that will be used to help the men and women of the Millennium.

We all hope that the remarkable prophecy of Revelation 20:6 will include every one of us in the Church of God: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." That immense blessing includes being a priest of the Father and of Christ. Between what God will do for us so that we can be successful in that role and what we each bring to the table ourselves from what we're learning and experiencing in this life, we can all sincerely believe that the role of a priest will not be beyond our abilities. I hope you are convinced that you can do this! (LN)



Through the Eyes of Faith

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

In an important sense, whether we are sighted or blind, we each have many “eyes.” We will look through one kind of eyes in one situation and through another kind of eyes in another. For example, if we look through the eyes of offense, we will see only faults. If we look through the eyes of envy, we will see only unfairness. A particular man may seem to be unremarkable to most people—but to his wife, who sees him through the eyes of love, he is the most wonderful man in the world. Often, what we see depends on which eyes we look through. And we usually *choose* how we will look.

Because Abraham and the others named in Hebrews 11 were looking through the eyes of faith, they saw something that others could not see. This “faith chapter” tells us that these men and women “all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

These individuals saw something that the rest of the world could not see, because they believed God. We in God’s Church are informed both by what we see in the physical world around us and *by faith*—seeing and trusting what God has revealed to us. What do we see?

This Holy Day season is a good time to look at the future of our world and the coming Kingdom of God through the eyes of faith.

Spiritual Blindness

God says that Satan successfully deceives the whole world, attempting to deceive even the true Church of God (Revelation 12:9; Matthew 24:24). How does Satan deceive so many? The “eyes” have it!

The world looks at God’s word through eyes blinded by disbelief. The Apostle Paul explained, “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3–4).

Faith *illuminates* our world. Through faith, God makes it possible for an uneducated person to know things that the

greatest professors do not know. King David wrote, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, *making wise the simple*” (Psalm 19:7).

The Apostle Paul often confronted intellectual authorities who were either offended by his message or thought it to be nonsense. He explained to the brethren in Corinth that “not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty... that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:26–29).

Many secularists have the conceit that they are intellectually superior to people of faith, whom they see as intellectually deficient. But the opposite is true: *Believing God makes you smarter*. Through faith, we can see many things others cannot—such as divine law, which truly identifies what is right and what is wrong. We can see God’s plan for humanity and a comprehensive way of life that leads to fulfillment and happiness. We can even see God in action in our lives. But we cannot see these things if we do not believe what He reveals in His word.

Generally speaking, secularists believe that they can only be informed by the material world and what they can reason from it—a worldview often called *materialism*. God’s Church believes that God *reveals* things we cannot know otherwise. We have an additional source of information. We understand that we can be *informed by faith*.

Western society is increasingly moving its foundation from the bedrock of revelatory knowledge to the shifting sands of secular human reason. “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting” (Romans 1:28). Solomon wrote, “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint” (Proverbs 29:18). That is certainly true of society today. However, Solomon continued, “but happy is he who keeps the law.” That is certainly true of God’s Church. God’s divine law arises from His own character, and God repeatedly says in Scripture that those who love Him love His law also (e.g., John 14:15, 21; 1 John 2:3–4; 5:3; Deuteronomy 11:13, 22; 19:9).

God Reveals

God shows us things that “eye has not seen, nor ear heard” (1 Corinthians 2:9)—things that we cannot know without His help. For instance, He tells us that His power works in us *through faith*. The Apostle Peter explained that we are those “who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5). The salvation that Peter speaks of is our salvation from death at the resurrection to immortality. We “put on immortality” in the future “at the last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:52–54). That eternal life is a gift from God (Romans 6:23).

God uses faith—specifically, the faith of Jesus Christ in us—to keep us living His way all our lives, which will lead to a great reward upon Christ’s return. But this is all nonsense to those who are blinded and cannot see. One can only know God’s way through the revealed knowledge in His word.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian brethren that “my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of *human wisdom*, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of

God uses faith—specifically, the faith of Jesus Christ in us—to keep us living His way all our lives, which will lead to a great reward upon Christ’s return. But this is all nonsense to those who are blinded and cannot see. **One can only know God’s way through the revealed knowledge in His word.**

men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:4–5). He wrote of the “hidden wisdom,” ordained “for our glory,” which the world’s rulers don’t understand (vv. 7–8). Paul continued, “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for *they are foolishness* to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (vv. 13–14). God reveals to us His great purpose for mankind, which the carnal mind cannot understand apart from God’s revelation.

God also reveals the *future* to those with faith to believe. “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand’” (Isaiah 46:9–10). God reveals that He has a Holy City planned and that Jesus Christ will rule from Jerusalem. Abraham was able to see it through faith (Hebrews 11:10, 13).

God’s great plan for mankind—the good news of the Kingdom of God—is something else we can know only through His

revelation to us. And one of the ways He reveals it is through His Holy Days. In order to complete His extraordinary plan, we must *live* in that faith. Paul told the brethren in Rome, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is *revealed from faith to faith*; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’” (Romans 1:16–17).

Our spiritual vision is precious. Jesus said, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it” (Luke 10:23–24). Do we deeply value what God shows us?

Can We See What Abraham Saw Afar Off?


In his letter to the Ephesian brethren, the Apostle Paul tells them that he prays “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ... may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the *eyes of your understanding* being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling,

what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in [among] the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe” (Ephesians 1:17–19).

Do we *see* “the hope of His calling”? God makes it visible through His Holy Days, when we look through the eyes of faith. Do we *see* “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”? God has glory reserved for His children—a time when Christ “will transform our lowly body

that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:21). Do we *see* “the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe”? This includes the great hope of *eternal life* (Titus 1:1–2), as well as the increase of God’s government and peace, of which “there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:7).

God promises such things, and He has the *power* to do what He promises (Isaiah 46:10). This Festival season is a good time to think about our faith as something that *changes how we see*. The Bible often presents faith that way. Faith does not limit our vision. We don’t see *less* because of our faith—we see *more*. True faith is never blind faith, because faith increases and *adds* to our vision.

Believing God makes you smarter. God can make even the simple wise (Psalm 19:7). We need to keep the eyes of faith wide open and, particularly during this Feast of Tabernacles, *catch the vision* of what God wants us to see in the picture He presents in these Holy Days. This Feast, let’s catch the vision—by looking through the eyes of faith! 

Why Have a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs?



By **Mark Sandor**

The Living Church of God publishes a statement of beliefs for all who might be interested in reading them. You can find it online, and it is a fairly quick read. In its current PDF form, it only takes up eight pages, and two of those do not discuss doctrines. Most readers would probably be able to finish reading all six content pages in a day. It briefly covers topics such as the Sabbath, tithing, the Holy Spirit, the Great Tribulation, and many more. But why not simply say that the Bible is the only “statement” we need? This article will examine several reasons why the Living Church of God has an Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs.

Let’s begin with a couple of obvious reasons. First, the Bible is a long book. While we should make every effort to read the entirety of the Bible during our lifetime—ideally more than once—sometimes a summary is a helpful resource when time is limited. It should not be read *instead of* the Bible, but reading it *alongside* the Bible can quickly address a broad range of topics and help identify areas in which deeper exploration may be necessary. For the ministry, our statement of beliefs can be especially helpful to give people who inquire about the Living Church of God or ask to be baptized. And it has been helpful for inquiries from the press and when communicating with governments in supporting our international membership around the world.

A second reason is also obvious. There are thousands of churches, sects, and denominations that all claim to be Christian yet believe in wildly different theologies. I was raised in a mainstream Protestant church that claimed to go by “scripture alone.” Yet its members did not keep the Sabbath, practice tithing, or talk about prophetic events like the Great Tribulation. And, needless to say, their trinitarian concept of the Holy Spirit is a far cry from what you will find in the Bible—as we make plain in our statement of beliefs. Simply put, there is so much confusion about God’s nature, His plan, and what it means to be Christian—and about a host of other doctrines and beliefs—that a concise statement of beliefs helps demonstrate what sets the Living Church of God apart.

Focusing on the Foundational

A third reason to have a statement of beliefs is that it points out basic truths on which we must be unified. The document identifies many key doctrines that are truly *fundamental*. To use a common expression, it helps us identify the trunk of the tree, as opposed to branches or twigs.

In many of his epistles, Paul exhorted the congregations to aim for unity: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). This exhortation especially applies to the doctrines covered in our statement of beliefs. We as members of God’s Church should not have differences of opinion about which day is the Sabbath or whether true Christians are commanded to keep it. God’s people should not have arguments about whether homosexuality or racism are sin—both clearly are, and both are briefly covered in the Statement. When we talk about coming together with people of like mind at Sabbath services, one key to being of one mind is being of one accord about the Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs—an accord that should produce gladness and praise (Acts 2:46–47)!

A fourth reason to have a statement of beliefs is that it helps us understand why we believe what we believe. Despite being a quick read, the Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs provides a long study! This is because it is packed with scriptural references to look up and review. These are often vital verses that illustrate why the Living Church of God believes a doctrine—and believes it to be *fundamental*. For example, the section titled “The Holy Bible” is all of three sentences long, but it also refers to three verses. There is not a single topic covered that does not contain a scriptural reference, and that is the way it should be, since we are told to live “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). When seeking to understand doctrine, we should look to the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16).

Of course, context is important, and many nominally “Christian” churches have twisted Scripture to produce a false gospel and false Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:4). We are commanded to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), and we must not make the mistake of assuming that the few verses

listed in our statement of beliefs tell the whole story. They are simply a starting point, and we must keep up with our personal daily Bible study to see the entire picture of the Bible. Many headings in the document connect with Church literature—for example, to know more about the Holy Bible than what just three verses can tell, we can read Dr. Douglas Winnail’s booklet *The Bible: Fact or Fiction?* The Church’s booklets expound on the Ten Commandments, unclean meats, and the Millennium, to name a few topics, and they can help us dive deeper into doctrines that our statement of beliefs only summarizes.

De-emphasizing the Doubtful

A fifth reason for the Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is that it *also* clarifies for us what is *not* fundamental when we consider what the document does *not* say. Of course, the absence of a topic does not mean that it is insignificant or that the Church has nothing to say on it. The statement of beliefs is not meant to be exhaustive, yet noting that something is *not* mentioned in it can still be helpful.

For example, it does not mention the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14. While the Church does teach about the 144,000—as can be read and studied in our booklet *Revelation: The Mystery Unveiled!*—the Council of Elders did not list the identity of the

When we talk about coming together with people of like mind at Sabbath services, one key to being of one mind is being of one accord about the Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs—an accord that should produce gladness and praise.

144,000 in the document. While it can be a fascinating subject to study, its absence from the Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs should be considered when we begin to take our personal speculations, or those of others, too dogmatically.

Paul instructs Christians to “receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things” (Romans 14:1). He goes on to discuss the “doubtful” issues of meat offered to idols and particular days of fasting. Such issues rarely plague God’s Church today—but other disagreements among members often take their place.

For example, discussion of vaccines is absent from the Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. As the COVID-19 pandemic reminded us, the Church has long encouraged individual members to do their own research and make their own personal choices regarding vaccines. The absence of the topic in the document does not mean that these decisions should be taken lightly, but it should give us perspective when we consider those who make decisions different from our own.

Finally, the Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs helps guide how we respond when differences arise within the body of Christ. For instance, when discussing doubtful things, we are reminded, “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls” (Romans 14:4). Even if we are certain that we have the correct answer on something not covered in the document, God’s word instructs us, “Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God” (Romans 14:22).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I spoke with a collection of brethren who held different views on vaccines, and those views were causing contention. After counseling with the pastor, reviewing Church literature, and doing their own Bible studies, the members of this congregation decided to simply stop talking about vaccines. This simple, mature decision ended the contention! No one’s minds were changed (so far as I know), but the brethren focused on the instructions found in Romans 14, Ephesians 4:1–6, and Philippians 2:1–3. They chose to promote group harmony through individual humility, recognizing that they were dealing with contentions about a doubtful thing—in this case, an issue not covered in the Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs.

On the other hand, some things are *not* doubtful, and issues do arise when someone wants to cause contentions over topics that *are* covered in our statement of beliefs. The Bible gives a different approach to these types of problems: “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them” (Romans 16:17). If someone wants to argue about the validity of the Sabbath, the definition of sin, unclean meats, or something else that is established doctrine, we are told not just to avoid the topic, but to avoid the individual. Such argumentative people will often simply stop attending, but sometimes they must be avoided. This command is restated in 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15. As these verses indicate, the goal of this avoidance is that such individuals will repent of their false ideas.

The Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is a powerful document that serves many purposes. If you have not read it in a while, please take some time to review it! It can serve as a quick reminder of the basic doctrines of the Living Church of God. It might spur you to further study of a topic that catches your eye. It can also help you decide how to handle contentions when they arise: Are they over doubtful issues that can be handled by avoiding those topics, or are they over trunk-of-the-tree issues that might indicate that a person should be avoided? All these lessons are there for you if you spend time with our Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs! (LN)

Value the Prophetic Worldview

By **Timothy Wilson**

When the Hubble Space Telescope was launched in 1990, scientists eagerly anticipated clear pictures of distant galaxies. However, it was soon obvious that something was very wrong with the telescope's optics. The reflective mirror, built to gather and focus light emitted in the distant past from faraway stars, was too flat at the edges by about 0.00009 inches. This minuscule error distorted the picture and gave astronomers blurred images.

The God of the Bible prophesies events thousands of years in advance, showing us a picture of the distant future. The Apostle Peter called prophecy “a light that shines in a dark place” that we “do well to heed” (2 Peter 1:19). The lens of Bible prophecy allows us to see the future as well as God's purpose for revealing it. However, that picture can become distorted by even small errors in our reasoning. Peter gives us a sobering warning, that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation [origin], for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (vv. 20–21). Bible prophecy is God's revelation to us, given through His inspired servants—not through our own intellect or effort.

As the days ahead become more troubling, a correct understanding of Bible prophecy will give us hope and stability. Having a good grasp of Bible prophecy is vital for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ's return to establish the Kingdom of God and for proclaiming the Ezekiel warning to the modern descendants of Israel. There are many ways in which we can view the world around us, but the precious gift of Bible prophecy is the primary lens through which we should view world events.

A worldview can be described as “the set of beliefs about fundamental aspects of Reality that ground and influence all one's perceiving, thinking, knowing, and doing” (Ken Funk, “What Is a Worldview?,” *OregonState.edu*, March 21, 2001). We come to a worldview through our individual experiences and through what we learn from our teachers. The prophetic worldview is unique because it is taught to us by Almighty God, through the inspired writers of the Bible. We should

continually check our thinking against His word. When we hear ideas concerning trends in the world, we need to check them against Bible prophecy.

It is not surprising that the Devil would attack something so vital to the Work and valuable to our stability. Satan cannot change the timing and orchestration of key events that God has ordained, but he can—and does—distract us by offering alternate contexts and explanations. We will consider three common worldviews—incomplete at best, and ultimately false—and see why we should primarily view the news through the lens of Bible prophecy.

“It's the Technology!”

The materialistic and humanistic worldview is dominant in this world's Western societies. This view sees our world as the product of science and human effort, and the growth of computing power has indeed provided amazing technological advances throughout the past several decades, from jet aircraft to generative artificial intelligence.

Some see the prospect of technology-driven economic development as a welcome means to lift everyone out of poverty, eliminate sickness, and provide safety and security in all countries. Others, however, see technology as the root of our problems. “Climate change” concerns have gripped politics in such a way that, rather than consider that unprecedented weather events might have anything to do with God's intervention, the world is being well conditioned to attribute them to the indiscriminate burning of fossil fuels.

The prophetic worldview, by contrast, reassures us that even dizzying technological development occurs on God's timetable. Genesis 11:6–8 reveals that, for His purpose, God slowed down the development of science and technology early in man's history. The printing press made possible the widespread preaching of the Gospel to the world (Matthew 24:14). The Internet burst onto the scene just when the Church needed a more efficient way to preach the Gospel. In the May 2017 *Tomorrow's World* telecast “Future Shocks,” our Presiding Evangelist, Mr. Gerald Weston, described modern technologies that the Bible predicted. Yes, God is in charge, and technological development is not outside His guidance and control.

“It’s the Institutions!”

Another influential worldview sees political and economic theory as the essential force driving the world order. National success, from this perspective, is viewed as the product of a constructive political-economic system, while national decline is the result of straying from such a system. This worldview tries to provide a particularly secular framework for predicting future events, but the Bible offers a moral and spiritual framework instead. Institutions certainly influence people, and some institutions are much better than others, but all worldly systems fall short of God’s Way. God reveals that righteousness and sin are the crucial factors in national success and decline. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 describe blessings and curses as the consequences of honoring or dishonoring God—sin is front and center (Jeremiah 30:15).

The scattered nations of the Israelites have had a diverse set of political-social-economic systems throughout their long histories. The United Kingdom and the United States have distinct political systems, but both experienced extraordinary prosperity that burst forth at the start of the nineteenth century, as Bible prophecy foretold. (For more on this in great detail, you can read Mr. John Ogwyn’s powerful booklet *The United States and Great Britain in Prophecy*, which explains why the arrival of God’s blessings was delayed for 2,520 years.) France and Norway also have different systems, but they too have been abundantly blessed in their own ways.

A prophetic worldview makes sense of the consistent blessings that are enjoyed by nations with diverse systems. It is not the systems that have provided these blessings—it is God, who lives up to His promises. Knowing this, we can also see why these same nations are now in decline and headed for disaster.

“It’s a Conspiracy!”

The final competing worldview we will consider in this article is the conspiratorial one. Conspiracy theories have become common across the political spectrum. Typically, the conspiratorial worldview involves the idea of a cabal of elites manipulating events through secret means to gain and maintain power. Most of the public, according to this worldview, is complicit by being gullible rather than evil. Yet although the various conspiracies are supposed to have been implemented by powerful forces able to work in secret, conspiracy theorists claim to have overcome that power, become “aware,” and set out to expose and stir the gullible public to action.

These ideas may seem like they are in line with the Gospel message, talking of good versus evil, but they are in fact a subtle perversion of it. For example, biblical prophecy talks of sin as being pervasive instead of limited to a few (see Romans 3:23; Revelation 12:9). The conspiratorial worldview

focuses on secret knowledge and rallying people to political action rather than to personal and national repentance and faith in God.

The Bible describes the times leading up to Christ’s return, and nowhere in its description do we find a one-world government of the type posited by many conspiracy theories. There are *three* power blocs described: the beast power, comprising ten rulers giving power over to it; the king (*singular*) of the South, and the confederation of kings (*plural*) of the East. Though much of humanity has longed for a one-world government ever since the days of the Tower of Babel, attempts to create one have failed again and again. Ultimately, we are looking forward to the one-world government that Jesus Christ will bring to this earth!

It’s Prophesied

Jesus Christ commands us to watch and pray (Mark 13:33). Bible prophecy gives us the lens through which the trends we observe can be accurately interpreted. Using this powerful lens, we should prioritize Bible study to gain a proper perspective on the news we will consume. The Bible reveals to us the mind of God, showing us what is right and wrong while imparting wisdom. The prophecy of Scripture shows God’s supremacy and promise to intervene.

How can we develop a biblical worldview of current events? We should choose news sources carefully—news that stirs toward political action is not what we should primarily be consuming. Instead, we should look for news that describes developments foretold in Scripture.

To that end, we shouldn’t neglect Church resources. Every week, the *News and Prophecy* updates from Headquarters highlight news items along with explanations of how the Bible is essential to their understanding. *Tomorrow’s World* telecasts and magazines connect key scriptures to current events to “make sense of our world through the pages of the Bible.” They keep these valuable scriptures fresh in our minds and show how they are relevant. Our booklets and the *Tomorrow’s World Bible Study Course* provide more in-depth study to ground us in the Bible, and it can be helpful to review the points that they lay out to keep the truth of the Bible firmly in mind.

There is a panoply of worldviews originating from the will of man. Each offers its explanation of individual events and trends, but each is ultimately inconsistent with reality. The true biblical worldview is the only one that we can fully rely on, because it comes from Almighty God.

The Bible’s prophetic worldview looks to God to reveal, to bring to pass, and to make right judgment. It gives us a purpose to support, and through that, it takes our mind away from selfishness and builds love for the people of our world. Let us strive to maintain that worldview! (LN)



TITUS 2:3-5

Woman to Woman

Let's Start Over

By **Janth B. English**

I have not conducted a scientific survey, but my personal observation leads me to believe that women have more “ups and downs” with personal relationships than do men. That may sound sexist, but there are real reasons why this may be true. We can agree that men and women are different physically. However, science has also shown that men’s and women’s brains are also “wired” differently, which makes us different psychologically and emotionally.

Of course there are exceptions, but women tend to use their intuition and emotions more than men when making choices and interacting with others. God has given us women a deep capacity to love and to express that love with outgoing concern for others. Our friends are very dear to us, and we hold them close to our hearts. We try to be the friend who is closer than a brother or sister (Proverbs 18:24), which often leads to deep emotional hurts if things go wrong—and things sometimes do go wrong.

How do we react when someone we care about says or does something that hurts us deeply? Often our first reaction is self-protection. We want to distance ourselves from that individual and not ever be in a circumstance that would allow that person to hurt us again. While this may be expedient in the short term, it is obviously not a long-term solution. When we consider what Jesus Christ would do in that situation, it is easy to see that He would not hide from the person who hurt Him but would instead seek to mend the relationship. Our goal should be to win back our sister (Matthew 18:15).

What if we are the ones who have offended someone we deeply care about? What if we have tried to apologize, but the friend we have hurt is still distant? We still have a responsibility then, even while we may be tempted to throw our hands up and say, “I tried.” I have found myself in this difficult situation. The problem began when I was discussing a sensitive subject with a friend whom I consider closer to me than my sisters, so I felt free to tell her what I thought. Those who know me know that I tend to be very direct (I’m working on that), and the unexpected result was that she was very hurt. I would like to share with you some of the lessons that I learned while we went through the process of becoming close again.

Gaining Your Sister

The first lesson I learned was that it ultimately does not matter who is right and who is wrong. Most of the time, there is enough blame to go around. The important thing is the restoration of the relationship. This often means a lot of pride must be swallowed, whether we are the offender or the offended party.

Many times, offending parties do not realize that they have offended someone. I know this sounds unbelievable to those who have been offended, but it’s true. If we have been offended, we should ask God to help us to be charitable regarding the offender’s true intentions. Do you really think your friend *wanted* to hurt you?

The offended woman has the responsibility to go to her sister about the matter rather than let the offense create distance between them. How we go to that sister and what words we use are very important. If our attitude is to just let off steam and put her in her place, we are not following the spirit of Matthew 18:15. It is wiser to wait until we are not so upset, when we can go to our sister with the right frame of mind. If we are the offender, we have the responsibility to hear our sister out, even if we feel that she has a wrong attitude and that we did nothing wrong. We can take this to God, too, asking Him to help us listen to our sister and to help us understand how she feels.

Once we understand how our actions have affected our sister, apologies are in order—and apologies should not include “buts” or “ifs.” Apologies should not reflect blame on others. A true apology may require us to pray and meditate about the situation so that we can have the mind of Christ on the matter before we attempt to be reconciled to our sister. This apology should make clear that we understand what caused the problem, which we can show by stating how our actions hurt our friend. We should accept responsibility for our actions and ask for forgiveness. We are all human. The offended party may not be able to forgive to the point of restoring the relationship when we first apologize. Some things don’t happen right away, which leads to a second lesson.

Time Helps Healing

I’ve learned that emotional scars take time to heal and that different people heal at different rates. If we are involved in

an accident that leaves a deep wound, we may have sutures to close the wound and a bandage to cover it, but it is far from healed—it is still tender to the touch. Emotional wounds can't be seen, but they are there. We need to exercise patience to give an offended person time to be able to engage again.

If we are too quick to try to talk it out, we may just rip the wound open. Instead, we can offer smiles and friendly hellos

A true apology may require us to pray and meditate about the situation so that we can have the mind of Christ on the matter before we attempt to be reconciled to our sister.

to let our friend see that we desire to restore the relationship. If we receive a less-than-friendly response, we have the strategy found in our Bibles—a soft answer turns away wrath (Proverbs 15:1). We should not let pride stand in the way of our goal to win back our sister.

What about the offended party? Is the relationship entirely at her discretion? What is her responsibility? This brings me to a third lesson.

The Greatest Mediator

We cannot bring about a peaceful resolution to relationship problems on our own; we need God's intervention. Both the offended and offending parties must seek His intervention in the matter. Both people have the responsibility to pray about the situation, to ask God to show them their faults in the matter, and to pray for one another. Fasting may be in order.

We are called to be born into the Family of God as brothers and sisters in Christ (2 Corinthians 6:18). God's will is that we be reconciled (Matthew 5:23–24), and that we forgive one another (Matthew 6:14–15; Colossians 3:13). God doesn't leave it up to us to decide whether to forgive or whether to strive for reconciliation—He commands that we do both.



Love Suffers Long

What happens when we've done all that we can do and there is still no progress in restoring the relationship? The answer to this question is the final lesson I want to share: Keep trying! Don't give up!

While we may not be able to approach our friend at such a time, we can still smile and show ourselves friendly.

We can learn the valuable lesson of perseverance in this situation, which builds godly character (Romans 5:3–4). We should continue to pray about the problem and ask Christ to

heal the hurt feelings. He wants to heal the brokenhearted (Isaiah 61:1).

Our intercessory prayers can make all the difference. We know that God is able to change our relationship for the better (Proverbs 21:1), and He will in His time. Our responsibility is to be ready to embrace the relationship when that time comes.

Stronger Than Before

These things may sound simple, but they are hard to do. They require us to exercise the Holy Spirit that God has given us. To restore relationships, we must be able to let go of hurt feelings and embrace forgiveness. We must exercise patience, gentleness, and self-control through the power of God's Spirit as we seek to resolve the problem (Galatians 5:22–23). We must be willing to clothe ourselves in humility as we await reconciliation with our sister in Christ (1 Peter 5:5). Restoring relationships is not easy (Proverbs 18:19); it requires spiritual maturity that may take time to develop. If we find it necessary and the situation warrants getting others involved, the steps we should take are outlined in Matthew 18:15–17.

At the beginning of this article, I mentioned a problem that existed between me and my sister in Christ. I am happy to say that we reconciled and that the relationship did become restored. The road was difficult. It took a lot of time—two years—and a lot of effort on both our parts. There were many lessons I learned that could not be shared in this short article; however, the bottom line is that relationships can be restored. We are even closer friends now that we understand each other better. We were able to start over and build on a more solid foundation.

If you have a relationship that you have given up on, *don't*. Start over by praying about the problem and for your "lost" friend. Ask God to intervene and heal the breach that has developed between you. God is in the business of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18), and He can give you and your friend the ability to start over. (L)

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Johnny and Gabrielle Barajas are pleased to announce that their son, **Josiah Israel Barajas**, was born on November 18, weighing eight pounds, 15 ounces, and measuring 21 inches long. Josiah's four older siblings and the Chicago, Illinois, congregation are thrilled to welcome him to the family.

Mr. and Mrs. Alex and Rachael Groen of the Gaffney, South Carolina, congregation are delighted to announce the birth of their fourth child, **Anneliese Maxine Groen**. She was born January 13, weighing six pounds, 15 ounces, and measuring 20-and-one-eighth inches long.

Mr. and Mrs. Chris and Leah Hine of the Edmonton congregation in Canada are pleased to announce the birth of their fourth child, **Hannah Loraine Hine**, on March 16, weighing six pounds, eight ounces, and measuring 20 inches long. Both mom and baby are doing great. Isaac, Lilyana, and Felix are thrilled with their new sister!

Weddings & Anniversaries

After Sabbath services on February 8, the Perth congregation in Australia surprised **Mr. and Mrs. Kinnear and Carolyn Penman** with a presentation of flowers and gifts on the occasion of their **50th wedding anniversary**. Mr. Penman is a longtime minister, and he and his wife have served God's people in several countries in Australasia as well as in Canada. They are a wonderful example to all the members. Following the presentation, everyone celebrated with them and enjoyed a special afternoon tea.

As the sun set over the old pier at Port Willunga in Australia on March 12, **Angus Montgomery** and **Gabrielle Bryce** were joined in marriage by Pastor Martin Montgomery. After the ceremony, the wedding party and family and friends celebrated together at a reception at the historic Salopian Inn. There were speeches, dancing, and even some family singing as the evening drew to a close. A few tears were shed as emotions ran high on the wave of excitement that a wedding brings. The Adelaide congregation is happy to welcome the newlyweds, and all wish them the best and pray for God's guidance in their marriage.

Ordinations

Mr. and Mrs. Randall and Cynthia Anderson were ordained deacon and deaconess on June 1 by Pastor Rand Millich and Elder James Populo. Mr. and Mrs. Anderson serve in the St. Joseph, Missouri, congregation.

Mr. Keith Bibb was ordained an elder on April 26 by Pastor Lambert Greer and Elder Steve Woolley. Mr. Bibb serves in the Cincinnati, Ohio, congregation.

Mr. Marc Casey was ordained an elder on April 13 by Pastor Rajan Moses. Mr. Casey serves in the Goa congregation in India.

Mr. Ricardo Colon was ordained an elder on May 31 by Pastor Wyatt Ciesielka and Elder Carl Derstine. Mr. Colon serves in the Raleigh, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. Randall Davis was ordained a deacon on June 1 by Pastors Phil West and Davy Crockett and Elder Dennis Shipley. Mr. Davis serves in the Little Rock, Arkansas, congregation.

Mr. Matthew Ellison was ordained an elder on June 1 by Pastors Glen Harrison and Dan Hall and Elders Richard Grimes and Johnny Tolbert. Mr. Ellison serves in the Stockbridge, Georgia, congregation.

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Mr. Keith Francis was ordained a deacon on May 17 by Pastor Phil West and Elder Dennis Shipley. Mr. Francis serves in the Fort Smith, Arkansas, congregation.

Mr. Dion Goosen was ordained a deacon on May 31 by Pastor Christoffel Botha. Mr. Goosen serves in the Bloemfontein congregation in South Africa.

Mr. and Mrs. Gary and Mary Johnson were ordained deacon and deaconess on June 1 by Pastors Glen Harrison and Dan Hall and Elders Richard Grimes and Johnny Tolbert. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson serve in the Stockbridge, Georgia, congregation.

Mr. Steven Smith was ordained an elder on April 19 by Presiding Evangelist Gerald Weston, Pastors Alex Celan and Bill

Whitaker, and Elders Frank Frye, Lehman Lyons, and Scott Lyons. Mr. Smith serves in the Walterboro, South Carolina, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Carlton and Wendy Stephens were ordained deacon and deaconess on June 1 by Pastors Glen Harrison and Dan Hall and Elders Richard Grimes and Johnny Tolbert. Mr. and Mrs. Stephens serve in the Stockbridge, Georgia, congregation.

Mr. Kelly Taber was ordained a deacon on April 19 by Pastor Lenny Bower and Elder Alex Pomicter. Mr. Taber serves in the Bristol, Virginia, congregation.

In Loving Memory

Mr. James Carter, 64, died unexpectedly but peacefully in his sleep on March 18. Mr. Carter was a longtime member of God's Church and attended in Sydney, Australia, until moving to Port Macquarie and then to Canberra for health reasons. His family had great respect for his beliefs and wanted them expressed at his funeral.

Mr. Donald Bruce Griffin, 85, born January 27, 1940, died on February 15. He is survived by his wife Martha, one son, two daughters, four grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. He and his wife were married 64 years and were baptized together in April 2006. He loved gardening, camping, and golf. Recognized for his focus on his family and his faithfulness to God and His Church, he is also remembered for his personal warmth and engaging smile.

Mrs. Oweta Ochoa, 100, died peacefully at home, surrounded by her family, on May 2, just a few days short of reaching 101. She was predeceased by her husband in 2011. Mrs. Ochoa heard Mr. Herbert Armstrong on the radio and subscribed to *The Plain Truth* magazine. She was baptized in 2014 and attended the Temple, Texas, congregation as long as her health permitted. Mrs. Ochoa had seven children, as well as ten grandchildren, 30 great-grandchildren, and 16 great-great-grandchildren, and she gently and memorably touched their lives. She was able to spend time with and speak to all of them during the last days of her life. She left them with many fond memories as well as an example of faithful-

ness in praying daily for them and for others and in commitment to God.

Mr. Jon Maxwell Rhodes, Sr., 85, died peacefully at his home on June 2. Mr. Rhodes was a faithful, active member of the Living Church of God in St. Louis, Missouri. He loved history and collecting historical items, and his work and passion was restoring classic English cars; his classic car restorations were shipped all over the world. He taught and influenced a strong work ethic and embraced family. He is survived by his wife Kay and will be missed by all who knew him.

Mrs. Anne Elizabeth Staley, 78, died April 11. Baptized into God's Church in 2016, she was known for her warmth, resilience, and a deep love for her family and faith. Mrs. Staley was preceded in death in July 2024 by her beloved husband Clyde, with whom she shared 55 years of love and partnership. She is survived by three children and five grandchildren.

Mr. and Mrs. Edward and Velma Stringer, longtime members of God's Church and of the Prince Albert congregation in Canada, died less than four months apart. Mr. Stringer died at the age of **91** on December 7, and Mrs. Stringer died March 29 at the age of **92**. They were married for more than 61 years. Mr. Stringer was baptized into God's Church in 1973 and served for many years as a deacon. Mrs. Stringer was baptized in 1983. They are greatly missed by their Church family and all who knew them.

Lessons from the Drive

The best parts of the drive to the Feast of Tabernacles are the beginning and the end. When the packing is done, we've locked the doors, and we've just left the driveway, we're brimming with excitement to be on our way. And when the drive is over, we can't get out of that car fast enough. Our minds are alive with the fact that *we made it*. We're deeply thankful that we took the trip, but even more thankful that it's finished and it ended where we hoped it would: somewhere God has placed His name and made ready for us to enjoy with our brethren.

There are many parallels between the physical journey to the Feast and our spiritual journey to the Kingdom of God. When we start, we're excited—we can't wait to get going, to make progress, to move forward. And we can't even fathom the joy and gratitude we'll experience when our trip finally ends and we're reborn, given God's name, and made ready to enjoy eternity in His Family.

But while the trip is underway, difficulties arise. Roads aren't always smooth, and other drivers don't always drive well—and, honestly, neither do we. Sometimes, the road can seem excessively long. And what if there's also heavy rain, a flat tire, or even an accident? Problems like these can tempt us to wonder if God is actually all that interested in getting us to the Feast. But as we keep in mind that His will is for us to be there, we keep driving however we can—and we inevitably find that He clears the path. Once we arrive at the Feast, we may even be able to uplift others with stories of trials we overcame, with His help, on the way there.

One lesson from the drive is that, if we're going to endure its hazards, we need to grasp how committed God is to finish-

ing it with us. He reveals our problems and sins to us not to convince us that we'll never make it, but to lovingly show just how much we can overcome with His Spirit to empower us. The Bride of Christ will have many stories to tell during her Husband's Millennial reign, as she comforts, uplifts, and even entertains her students. Giving us the Kingdom is our Father's pleasure, not His burden (Luke 12:32)—and the more deeply we understand that, the more motivated we'll be to continue the journey.

And we need that motivation because, as we travel, we encounter countless billboards for restaurants, shopping malls, and other tourist traps that try to distract us from driving. It's not that we can't enjoy our trip—snacks, music, conversation with our fellow travelers, the occasional rest stop, and other mid-drive delights can help us stay energized at the wheel.

But this is where self-examination comes in: Are we simply enjoying a source of rejuvenation on our journey, or are we taking our eyes off the goal? "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). God certainly never intended our routes to be dull and joyless—but using more mileage on detours than on reaching our destination may result in a wasted trip.

For those with God's Spirit, human life is meant to be spent in constant anticipation of eternal life in His Kingdom, just as our journey to the Feast is spent looking forward to arriving there. The drive isn't always fun, but if we deeply believe that God is with us in every mile and bringing us ever closer to a beautiful destination, we'll keep our eyes on the road and our foot on the gas. Let's keep driving—we're almost there.

—Thomas White