

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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True Happiness: Living a Life of Service

Dear Brethren,

The summer of 2025 marked the 64th year since Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong established a teen camp for Church youth, a tradition we are continuing in the Living Church of God. A lot has changed since 1962, when teens gathered for eight straight weeks in Big Sandy, Texas. As with most new ventures, it was an exciting but primitive start compared to camps today. Nevertheless, it was the beginning of a long-standing and expanding program.

Yes, our world has changed dramatically over the last six decades, and our camp programs are different in many ways. The lengths of camps have changed. Faculty and staff have changed. Ways of dealing with disciplinary problems have changed. Even the names of our camp programs have changed: Summer Education Program (S.E.P), Global Youth Camp (GYC), Living Youth Camp (LYC), Living Youth Programs (LYP). There have been many ups and downs since that exciting beginning in 1962.

It was therefore important, this summer, to remind those attending Staff Orientation at Teen Camp in Texas of our legacy—the traditions and values handed down and built upon through the years—lest we forget. With the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God, those of us who joined with Dr. Roderick C. Meredith to revive the Work that God had used Mr. Armstrong to build had to begin all over again. Dr. Meredith had to start a new magazine, write new booklets, and even begin a new youth program.

Few fully comprehend what it means to build a youth program from scratch. It takes time and work to develop a harmonious team of like-minded individuals to implement practices and traditions. Thankfully, we possessed resources of personal experience to call upon.

Recapturing True Values

In 1995, our first Global Youth Camp at Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri, was truly a humble beginning. The most important takeaway from that year was our need for a trained staff—something that literally takes years to build and, once built, requires an ongoing process to maintain. We realized that we needed an intermediate step between camper and adult staff—a training program for future leaders.

So, the next year, we introduced what we have variously called High School Staff or Young Adult Staff. Over time, we concluded from experience that those given this responsibility were best chosen from the ages of 16 to 18, though only a few 16-year-olds possess the necessary maturity. We knew that from these teens would come the counselors and leaders for the years to come.

There were other changes that needed attention as well, such as enforcing a staff curfew. No staff members can give their best when suffering from sleep deficits, and many young people do not have the discipline to go to bed at a reasonable hour. Applications, schedules, and a Counselors' Manual needed to be created and refined.

Maintaining a consistently high-quality, values-based program takes diligence—and not everyone catches the vision. So, Mr. Jonathan McNair and I, and several others, “came out of retirement” in 2021 to rebuild our camp program, recapturing true Living Youth Program values that were being lost. These included concepts such as doing all things decently, in order, without confusion, and in peace; leaving no one behind; and de-emphasizing the “cool factor.” We put in place mechanisms to discourage the development of in-crowds and out-crowds and the practice of girls and boys pairing off—practices de-

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structive to a program designed to serve all campers. We instead encourage outgoing concern for others.

And these must be more than words thrown about with no effort to put them into practice. Deliberately designed traditions and mechanisms must be in place to encourage godly behavior and discourage hurtful behavior. We revived the mission statement that had been created almost two decades earlier: “To bring teens together in a learning environment for the purpose of recapturing true values; and to further the creation of a culture of purity, honor, and respect among the youth within the Living Church of God.” It should be evident from this statement that Living Youth Camp is about more than having fun. In fact, you may have noticed that the word *fun* is not in our mission statement!

That does not mean fun is not a part of Living Youth Camp activities. It most certainly is! We *want* our young people to have fun—but that should never be the primary goal of camp. Even sinful behavior is often “fun” (Hebrews 11:23–26). As we were taught at Ambassador College, godly fun does not bring regrets the next day, and it is aligned with practicing values that are rooted in the Bible.

It is only through learning the values of outgoing concern that lasting peace and happiness result. As the Apostle Paul quoted Jesus Christ, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). This principle applies to teens as well as adults. True Christianity is a way of life—the way of outgoing concern (Philippians 2:3–8).

Reviving a Program of Giving

The High School Staff program was dropped under a different administration for the better part of a decade, so reviving this position of service involves more than merely announcing the opportunity—it requires changing minds. In the years before the program was dropped, we had to turn some applicants away and ask them to be campers for another year, since, for logistical reasons, we limited High School Staff positions to twelve boys and twelve girls. Yet we struggle to attract half that number today. Why?

What we hear from several campers is that they want to remain campers for as long as they can. They see that being on

staff requires work and sacrifice. That is true, but it is hardly the whole story. Maturity involves recognizing the worth of work, of accomplishing something of value. It means preparing for adult responsibilities. It means giving back to others—a sentiment expressed by many who choose to serve as High School Staff.

We see that there has been a societal change in how both parents and children think. I can only speak in generalities, but consider that the first camp in 1962 was eight weeks long with no cellphones. If you talk to any who were there, you will hear that they do not remember calling home more than once or twice, if that. Many of today’s parents can hardly imagine such a scenario.

We must ask ourselves: Have cellphones made parents and children more accepting of delayed maturity? Of course, not all technological advancements are bad—but we must recognize the ways technologies change us, and we would be wise to make thoughtful decisions regarding how we let ourselves be affected. The term “delayed adolescence” has been around for decades, but growing up to be mature adults has only been delayed further.

Homeschooling, which I fully support when it is done right, has also made many—certainly not all—children and teens less adventurous. I do not mean to impugn any parent, as parenting is the most difficult job there is, but there is a reason we hear the term “helicopter parents” today. Of course, that always refers to someone else, never oneself!

Serving as High School Staff at Teen Camp is one way to encourage maturity among our youth. Seventeen-year-olds who have enjoyed being campers since their preteen years need to consider: Is it not time to give back? Or, to put it more bluntly, is it not time to grow up? If we truly believe Jesus’ words, internalizing that it is more blessed to give than to receive, parents would be wise to encourage their children to—for their own good—take the mature approach of living a life of service. The world has changed and so have our youth camps, but our determination to recapture the true value of caring for others must not—for that is truly the way to lasting happiness.



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What Kind of Ambassador Are You?

January 16, 2026, will mark the 40th anniversary of the death of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, the man God used to restore the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and preach it to the world. His voice blanketed North America on radio during the 1950s and '60s. He met with many of the best-known leaders across Europe, Africa, and Asia, explaining how peace would eventually come to this troubled world. He explained—to Emperors Hirohito of Japan and Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, to many kings, queens, prime ministers, and parliamentarians, and to countless civic leaders—that there are two ways of life: the way of outgoing concern and the way of getting for the self.

In addition to these many accomplishments, God used Mr. Armstrong to establish three liberal arts college campuses: at Pasadena, California and Big Sandy, Texas in the United States, and at Bricket Wood in England. His choice of the name “Ambassador College” was deliberate—in addition to training some men for the ministry, he saw the college as a way to train young people to be ambassadors of God’s Kingdom. Those of us blessed to attend one of the campuses were taught grooming and dress, table manners, how to speak to and converse with others, and how to be comfortable in the presence of both small and great.

We often sing the hymn “Ambassadors for Christ.” It is a hymn with an important message—a message Mr. Armstrong understood long before that hymn was written. But how easy it is to merely repeat the words of a familiar hymn without focusing on their meaning. The words, of course, come from the Bible. The Apostle Paul explained to the brethren at Corinth that they must become ambassadors of a kingdom very different from the one in which they lived their physical lives. Let us notice his instruction in detail.

Ambassadors for Christ

We begin with the context of what Christ did for us and what our response must be. “The love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14–15). Professing Christians often talk about “what Christ has done for me,” and that is certainly important. Without His sacrifice, nothing else really matters—but we see from these verses that Christ’s death for all demands a response from us. We,

too, must figuratively die and live no longer for ourselves, but for Christ. We must put to death the former self and become a new person. This is what Paul explained in detail to the Romans, describing the spiritual death of our former self through baptism:

Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin (Romans 6:3–6).

This is not difficult to understand, but it is not easy to put into practice. We must never forget that baptism is not an end but a beginning. Paul explained to the Corinthians that we each must become a different person. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

But what is the ultimate purpose of putting the old self to death and being transformed or converted? Is it not reconciliation with our Creator? Yes, God wants us to be reconciled to Him. He desires fellowship with us, but we can only have it if we walk in harmony with Him. As the Apostle John explained, “that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

John went on to explain that while Christ’s blood covers our sins, we must walk anew, in light rather than darkness. “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:5–7). And if we claim to be Christ’s but walk in the darkness of this world, we deceive ourselves (2:3–6).

Christ's shed blood is indeed necessary to cover our sins, but reconciliation requires a positive response of obedience—from us, just as from the Corinthians. Not only are we individually to be reconciled to God; we are part of the body of Christ through whom He is doing His work of reconciliation. "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18–19).

The world as a whole is far from being at one with God, and we well understand that God is only working with a few today. So, what is the task of those of us who have been called during this age? Paul comes to the heart of the matter: "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Yes, Paul was pleading with the Corinthians to be reconciled to God, saying that he and his fellow ministers were ambassadors, but through him God is also pleading with us to reconcile people to God. We, too, must be ambassadors for Christ. What kind of ambassadors are we then to be?

In July of 2025, Mr. Wallace Smith presented an insightful telecast with an intriguing title: "You Do Not Belong to You." He opened by talking about the spirit of this age, as expressed in *my opinions, my desires, my ideas, my fulfillment*. Self is everywhere expressed in conversation: *self-will, self-fulfillment, self-respect*, and psychologist Abraham Maslow's pinnacle of success, *self-actualization*. Mr. Smith boldly stated that—contrary to popular belief—you are not the center of the universe. "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:7–8).

Our Dual Citizenship

An ambassador is not his own. He must subjugate his own opinions and desires to represent those of his government while residing in a foreign country. Paul occasionally referenced the concept of dual citizenship, pointing out that although he held the valued status of Roman citizen, God had chosen him to represent a different citizenship—one reserved in Heaven (Philippians 3:20). Of course, this does not mean that Heaven is our reward—only that our citizenship is derived from there. Many people are citizens of one country while living in another, and many hold dual citizenship. If you belong to Christ, you too are a citizen of Heaven. In that sense, we are all dual citizens. One citizenship is merely temporary. The other is eternal, of vastly greater value.

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus referenced this in His prayer to His Father regarding His disciples, saying, "I do

not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" (John 17:15–18).

Our most important citizenship is that of the Kingdom of God. Perhaps you have never thought of it this way, but ask yourself: *Which kingdom do I most represent as an ambassador—this world's culture or the Kingdom of God?* While we live in the world, we as Christians must not conform to the course of this present evil age (Galatians 1:3–4; Ephesians 2:1–2). We must represent the Kingdom of God *during our lifetime* if we hope to be born into that Kingdom at Christ's return.

A great transformation must take place at baptism and in the time following. We might even say that the transformation, the conversion from carnal thinking to spiritual thinking, is radical. Jesus explained that we must deny ourselves—must reject our past ways of thinking and acting. "When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, 'Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it'" (Mark 8:34–38). Losing one's life is more than physically dying as a martyr. It involves putting to death our carnal human reasoning (2 Corinthians 10:3–6).

Going All-In

When counseling people for baptism, we often read Luke 14. We call it the "counting the cost" chapter. I often say that verse 26 is the Bible's most sobering verse, because it separates the seriously dedicated from all pretenders: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, *he cannot be My disciple*." Christ repeats that last phrase again in the next verse for emphasis. When entering the water of baptism, it is easy to profess that you will put Jesus above all else, but your commitment to that profession shows up in the daily decisions you make after coming up from the water.

To put Jesus Christ and God the Father before every other relationship—and being willing to give your life in doing so—is not an unreasonable request, as They set the example for us. The Father willingly endured the sight of His Son's brutal death on our behalf, and the Son submitted to His Father's will that we might be with Them forever. Jesus faced an agonizing decision, as we read in the words of His prayer: "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

The Bible tells us how we are to conduct ourselves as ambassadors of Jesus Christ. As a general principle, this involves living by what is known as the Golden Rule: "Therefore,

whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). This rule portrays a way of thinking that is radically different from what is practiced in the world. Instead of being about “me and mine,” about selfishness and self-will, it puts each of us into others’ shoes when interacting with them.

A principle closely associated with the Golden Rule is that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). This goes against human nature, which pulls us to do what we want to do the way we want to do it. Jesus gives us a specific way to practice this principle: “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). Yet how many of us expect others to “return the favor” after we have given to them?

“My Identity”

Many of us in the ministry have noticed that, before committing to God, a significant number of people—maybe most, if not all—have something they find difficult to give up. It might be an addictive habit involving smoking, vaping, alcohol abuse, or pornography. Sometimes a person must put a job or schooling on the line to keep the Sabbath or leave a job that is not compatible with a godly life. There are men who want to hang onto long hair and women who do not want to give up Christmas “because of the children.” The list is endless, and we do not know the struggle of each person who comes to the truth, but there is usually one “biggie” for each person.

The struggle to conform to Christ and to represent Him as an ambassador does not end with baptism. Dress and grooming fashions change, and it is easy to get caught up in new fads and trends. Mr. Armstrong showed great balance on this subject and wanted us to understand how ambassadors present themselves. He did not want us to be stuck in the distant past when it comes to grooming and fashion, but neither did he want us jumping onto every new trend that is driven by often unbalanced and even perverted designers. There are some fashions that, for a variety of reasons, are simply not appropriate for an ambassador of Christ.

When attempting to explain some of these things to members, we sometimes hear, “I must be true to myself,” or “This is my identity,” or “This is who I am.” However, when we chose to follow Christ, we professed to be true to Him, to allow Him to live in and transform us by His Spirit, and to give up who we once were. Can you imagine Christ attending a formal reception in purple hair, a man-bun, or a baseball cap? Yet “casual” is the way millions go to worship God on Sundays, and even some Church members appear to agree with this worldly approach.

One Saturday evening, as I was taking a fellow minister to a downtown Toronto hotel where he was staying during a conference, we noticed quite a few young women dressed like prostitutes—short and tight skirts, revealing tops, etc. It took us a few blocks before we realized that these were college students heading for bars, restaurants, and nightclubs. This is apparently the fashion, but should it be the standard for godly women of any age? Should an ambassador for Christ show up at the beach in a bikini? No, dear brethren, we in God’s Church represent a very different Kingdom with a radically different culture (1 Timothy 2:8–10; 1 Peter 3:3–5).

There is another trend you may observe in Western culture, one seen even in very fine restaurants where a couple might go for an anniversary. A lady comes “dressed to the hilt,” as they say, but the man with her is dressed casually, sometimes even wearing shorts and a baseball cap. This is also the way many high-school-aged boys dress for their prom; the young lady is dressed fashionably, the two order a limousine to go to dinner, and he is casually dressed—no doubt just “being true to himself”! Do these men have such little respect for their wives and dates? Are these ladies that desperate?

Let Us Commit Our Hearts and Minds

Some have denied that the parable of the man who showed up at the wedding without a wedding garment has anything at all to do with physical attire (Matthew 22:8–14). It is true that the emphasis is on righteousness rather than literal dress, but the parable would be meaningless if there were not some kind of expected dress code. How pleasant it is at our Living Youth Camps to see our young men appropriately dressed for an evening of Topics and Dance or for the final Banquet and Dance. They are showing respect to the young ladies with whom they are paired for the evening. It is beautiful to see our young people that way, and—even more importantly—they are learning qualities of ambassadorship. They represent a way of life that shows respect and dignity. At more than one Church wedding, I have heard someone ask, *Where do all these young people come from? They are so clean-cut. Where did they learn such manners and how to dance that way?*

Mr. Armstrong saw the big picture. He recognized what Paul meant by our becoming ambassadors for Christ. The people we meet notice how we conduct ourselves. Our behavior either represents the degenerate culture of this age or the coming Kingdom of God.

Let’s not mindlessly repeat the words the next time we sing this refrain—let’s think about what these words mean: “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors and called to be God’s sons, to declare His holy Kingdom, that His will on earth be done. Be reconciled to God, and let us commit our hearts and minds: ambassadors for Jesus Christ, the Savior of all mankind.” ^(LN)



Better Understanding God's Love

By **Wallace G. Smith**

There are many aspects of our Creator, the Eternal God, that are beyond our ability to completely understand. While we can intellectually recognize some things about Him, there is much we will never *fully* know until we are experiencing the same existence He does on the other side of the resurrection. We find one such aspect of God—reflected in this case in the Son, Jesus Christ—described in a passage the Apostle Paul wrote to the brethren in Ephesus. He told them that he prayed “that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” (Ephesians 3:17–19).

If we are paying attention, the last part of that passage presents a bit of a conundrum. How can we “know the love of Christ” if that love “passes knowledge”?

The world around us does not make it easier, to be sure. Many of the different strains of “Christianity” that surround us have reduced the concept of God’s love to something relatively trivial. Performers in stadiums sing about Jesus as a worldly female pop star would sing about her current boyfriend, and worshippers in megachurches close their eyes, raise their hands, and sway from side to side, basking in the “glow” of “God’s love.”

But God’s love is rich and profound, and it defies such attempts to reduce it to mere human chemistry. In this life, we will likely never come to comprehend it fully—one of the great challenges of our entire lives is to grow in our understanding of the incomparable love for us possessed and expressed by the Father and the Son.

In fact, seen clearly, growing in our understanding of God’s love is part and parcel of growing toward eternal life. How so?

Jesus said in His prayer with His disciples on Passover evening, before His arrest and crucifixion, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). And if knowing God is a fundamental aspect of attaining eternal life, then under-

standing Him means grappling with this fact: “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8).

What a profound statement that is! “*God is love.*” It is hard for us to fathom as human beings that any one characteristic could be such a definitive part of our character that such a statement could be made of us. Yet love is so central—so fundamental, so integral—to who God is, what He does, and how He thinks, that the Bible can say, “God is love,” and it’s not an exaggeration; it’s fundamentally true.

So, if eternal life is our desire, and thus knowing God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ is our desire, then coming to better understand Their love is an essential goal—as challenging as it may be.

We Have Help

As we seek to grow in that understanding, God has not left us at the mercy of human philosophies or whatever ideas our own hearts might conjure up. Instead, He has provided us with real assistance in this life.

For instance, we can, ourselves, partake of God’s Holy Spirit. Through that Spirit, “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts” (Romans 5:5). So crucial is the Spirit to understanding the love of God that it is hard to imagine how we could even begin to move in that direction without that Spirit dwelling in us, transforming us, and enabling us to partake of the divine nature ourselves (2 Peter 1:4).

We also have God’s law of love, which outlines His love in everyday terms, showing us how to act, speak, and even think in ways that help us to grow in that love, ourselves. God’s law and His love are so intertwined that Paul said that “love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10), and Jesus said that the entirety of “the Law and the Prophets” hangs on the two commands to love God and love our neighbor.

And even the creation, itself, serves as an aid in understanding the love of God—in particular, the love of parents.

Many passages in the Bible reveal that the physical world around us is *theomorphic*—meant to reflect various aspects of God. Our shape and mental capacity, for instance, is patterned after our Creator, and we are made in God’s image

(Genesis 1:26–27). And marriage between a man and a woman is meant to picture the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:31–32). These are not ideas we somehow “force” upon God—they are aspects of the creation and physical reality designed by Him to reflect aspects of Himself and divine realities.

And parenthood plays a special role in this revelation. God is our *Father*. The entire purpose of His plan is to grow His *family*. Thus, meditating on our own experiences concerning the love of our parents, or our love for our children, becomes an avenue toward better understanding God’s love for us.

As we’ll see, Jesus Himself takes advantage of this fact in His own efforts to reveal God’s love to us. In the remainder of this article, we will follow His lead and lean on our common human experience, either with parents or as parents, as we seek to refine our understanding of God’s love. And as we do, we’ll also address some misconceptions we can have about that love.

Not Just a “Corporate Love”

For example, one misconception about God’s love is that it is some sort of “corporate love”—that is, a love for the whole Body of Christ, or just a love for the collective “you.” Of course, He does love His Church in the collective sense, but it is crucial to understand that He also loves you, *personally*—you, whoever you are, reading this article right now. If you were the only one who had ever sinned, Christ would still have chosen to die, just for you.

King David had a grasp of this individual love. Consider His words in Psalm 33: “The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works” (vv. 13–15). David didn’t consider God’s work of building and developing humanity as some sort of “assembly line” effort, but instead he saw God as a dedicated artisan working on each of us—personally and intimately.

Our Heavenly Father is invested in each of us as *individuals*—in our individual development as sons and daughters.

In fact, David’s understanding of the personal, loving attention he possessed from God left him intimidated by the wonder of it. Throughout Psalm 139, David waxes poetic about the individual attention His Creator lavishes on Him, even speaking of God’s formation of him in his mother’s womb (v. 13). Upon reflecting on the fact that he lives each day under the intimate gaze of his Heavenly Father’s attention, he proclaims, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it” (Psalm 139:6).

Perhaps we find it hard to believe that our Father really loves us individually—thinks about us, makes plans concern-

ing our individual lives, or longs to spend time with us as individuals. But not only does Jesus assure us that God has numbered the very hairs of our heads (Matthew 10:30), He also says something about us that should leave us no doubt. In His prayer to God for us before His arrest, He says that He longs for the world to know that God “loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:23).

Note that carefully: Jesus said God loves us as He loved Him. Do we doubt God’s individual love for Jesus? Surely not! Then let us not doubt His individual love for us!

Not Just Because He “Has To”

Another misconception some have is the idea that God loves you out of mere obligation or requirement—because He “must” or is “contractually obligated,” as if he might choose *not* to love us if the circumstances changed. But that is not the case.

Often in pre-marital counseling, we discuss love as a choice, and it’s true that we must actively choose to love, especially in difficult times—but just as love is more than an emotion, it’s also more than a duty. Love is a profound, multifaceted commitment, and God’s love for us is far deeper and more significant than mere obligation. Loving us is His natural state.

Becoming a parent can help you see that. Fatherhood certainly helped me. When you see your children suffer—due, say, to illness or injury—you feel something unique. I remember the first time one of mine had an ear infection; he was crying from the pain, and he was so little that words of consolation weren’t registering. I remember praying that God would put his pain on me, instead—because I loved that little baby! That wasn’t anything special about me, to be sure. Many of you reading have been in a similar situation or will be. I learned from that experience that Jesus Christ’s sacrifice was not only about His personal actions and choices—as Mr. Gerald Weston has mentioned many times, the day of Christ’s death must have been a difficult day for the Father, as well. They each paid a price, and Paul points us to that price to say, *They loved you enough to go through this.*

And why do we love our children? Is it because the law says we have to? Because we will be arrested and placed in “parent jail” if we don’t? Is it out of obligation?

None of that. We love them because of who they are and because they’re ours.

If you are a parent at a park, and you see a nearby child scrape his knee and call for his mom, you don’t ignore him—you care, and you help him find his parents. But it’s different with your *own* children, and that isn’t wrong. It’s as it should be. You scan the little crowd at the park from time to time for your children, because they are yours and you love them. You look for them not just to make sure they are behaving, but simply because they are yours.

God loves you because you're His and because you're you. He says to a rebellious Israel, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). God's thoughts are never of hatred for us, but of hope for a wonderful future.

We are commanded to "love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5). This may seem extreme at times, and it is. It is the sort of love we all have to grow into over time, and it must be rooted in more than a sense of obligation. It must be a love born out of our very natures.

Yet God is not commanding us to grow into a love that He does not already feel, Himself. Note His own words to Israel: "I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul" (Jeremiah 32:41). The love He commands us to grow into is the love He already has for us. He asks us to give our all because He has already given His all.

Jesus encourages us in this by saying, "Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you"

Parental love must be unconditional—not a function of what the child does or does not do. After all, we read that "whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:12). God's correction is not to make us lovable again—it only takes place because He loves.

(Luke 12:31). It's easy to be overly anxious as we strive to focus on seeking God's Kingdom, feeling He might be disappointed in us. But Christ's next words reassure: "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (v. 32).

Those are not the words of obligation! God is not going to give us His Kingdom merely because we have fulfilled our part in some sort of contract. It is His *good pleasure* to do so! Why? Because He loves us.

Jesus Christ worked to help us embrace the fact that the Father loves us—not begrudgingly or out of obligation, but out of true bonds of affection—by pointing us to our own imperfect fathers. "What man is there among you who," He asked, "if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him" (Matthew 7:9–11). Even human parents, despite their many human flaws, long to give

good gifts to their children. Why would we doubt that God longs to do the same?

God inspired Isaiah to record His profound love for sinning Israelites who felt forsaken: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me" (Isaiah 49:15–16).

Those are not the words of a God who loves each of us merely out of obligation or contractual commitment. That is a *parent's* love.

His Love Is Unconditional

That last passage helps to illustrate another misconception that we must conquer as we seek to understand God's love more fully: the idea that God only loves us when we're good. In fact, He loves us all the time. His love for us is unconditional.

This truth has been twisted by the lawless, so we should clarify that loving people doesn't mean their obedience doesn't matter. God's love is not an excuse for our disobedience, and such satanic theologies should be cast aside with

vehemence. A parent's love for his child doesn't mean the child's obedience means *less* to him—if anything, he takes *more* pleasure and joy in seeing his son or daughter obey! As the Apostle John said of his spiritual children in the faith, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4).

Yet parental love must be unconditional—not a function of what the child does or does not do. In the booklet

Successful Parenting: God's Way, Dr. Jeffrey Fall mentions "unconditional love" 13 times, pointing out that even our correction of our children must be grounded in that love. After all, we read that "whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:12). Note the order: God's correction is not to make us lovable again—it only takes place *because He loves*.

If we don't grow in our grasp of God's unconditional love, we risk seeing Him as an authoritarian figure who guides and corrects us without being personally invested, instead of seeing Him as a loving Father who guides and corrects us *because* He is personally invested. We must recognize that God loves us unconditionally—not just when we're good.

Even the Festival pattern teaches us this. The very first Festival—the one that, of necessity, precedes all the others—is *Passover*. Before we come to possess the Spirit, pictured by Pentecost, and even before we have repented and turned from sin and toward Him, pictured by the Days of Unleavened Bread, comes Passover, picturing the Father's giving of

His own Son for us: “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

If the Father and Son were willing to go to *that* length for us out of their love for us—while we were still *enemies* (v. 10)—then what limit is there to that love? As Paul writes in Romans 8, “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (vv. 33–35).

The unconditional love of God is illustrated well in Christ’s tale of the prodigal son, told in Luke 15. In the parable, there was a wealthy man who had sons. One of them decided, *I don’t want to wait until you’re dead, old man, to have my inheritance—I want it now*. His father gave him his part of the inheritance, and he proceeded to live a terrible life. He was able to buy a lot of “friends,” but when the money ran out, the friends ran out, and he found himself essentially sitting in a pigpen, so starved that he craved the garbage given to the animals. “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants”’” (Luke 15:17–19). Knowing he had done wrong, this son crafted a confession to tell his father, hoping that his father would forgive him. Then, “he arose and came to his father” (v. 20).

Now, notice what the next part of the story *doesn’t* say: *When the son finally arrived, his father looked at him sternly and allowed him to go on and on about how unworthy he was—and then, grimacing, he finally nodded toward a door for the boy to go and think about his crime some more*.

Instead, the prodigal son didn’t even make it to the house before his father acted: “But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him” (v. 20). Just the sight of his son coming back was enough to move the father to run to him and shower him with affection—before his son even had time to start his prepared speech. And even after the son *had* started, he was unable to finish before the father called out to his servants, “Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (vv. 22–24).

Was the father’s love conditional? Were these the actions of a father stewing in disdain and disappointment while

his son was gone? A father whose heart was cold and distant during the son’s absence? Clearly not! While the son’s prodigal living had put distance between himself and his father—such that his father’s love could not be seen or experienced—it is plain in the story that the father *never stopped loving his son*. And Jesus intended that as a lesson for us about *our* Father.

We simply *must* understand this aspect of God’s love for us. There are times when we feel that we have messed up so much that our journey back to God will be an agonizing walk of shame. In those times, we must remember that God is not just waiting for us at the end of that journey. Rather, upon the sight of our turning, even at a distance, He has met us on the way, fallen upon our neck, kissed us, and has already begun actively bringing us into a restoration of our relationship with Him—because His love is unconditional.

Love that Transforms

Coming to better understand God’s love for us is more than an academic exercise. It is in many ways transformative.

We’ve already seen that it should transform our understanding of God’s correction. He is not seeking to make us lovable again. He is correcting us *because* He loves us.

To whatever degree we can grow in understanding God’s love for us, that understanding transforms how we perceive and experience our trials. When you comprehend how profoundly God loves you, that understanding feeds a deep and abiding trust in Him, knowing that if He has chosen to allow a trial, His love is behind that choice—and He will be by your side every step of the way.

When we grow in comprehending God’s love for us, that comprehension transforms our understanding of His law. We will see His commands not as arbitrary rules given by a God who simply enjoys bossing us around, but as guidelines provided for *our* good, not His (Deuteronomy 10:13).

Understanding God’s love for us transforms our relationships with others. When we recognize how much God truly loves us, we open our mind to recognizing how much God truly loves our brothers and sisters in Christ—even those we may find irritating or offensive. How can we hold a grudge against our brother when we recognize how much he means to God? How can we hold some record of wrongdoing against our sister when we comprehend the love God has for her?

Ultimately, the pursuit of understanding God’s love involves seeking to grow in loving Him and loving others in the same way we, ourselves, are loved by Him. And while such a goal is truly the project of a lifetime, it opens the door to the greatest transformation of all: eternal life alongside our Father and Elder Brother, experiencing—and perfectly reflecting, ourselves—Their divine love, forever. (L)

Texas Teen Camp 2025

By **Jonathan McNair**

As the applications rolled in for this year's Texas Teen Camp, we realized that this was going to be a big year. Space for campers was at a premium as we almost reached capacity. As campers finally arrived, we showed 55 boys and 55 girls on our camper roster. Having an equal number of boys and girls makes it easy to coordinate our co-ed activities at camp—but this was just the first of many factors that contributed to a smooth-running camp for 2025.

While we can sometimes casually refer to “the best Feast ever,” or the “best camp ever,” we have a different philosophy at Living Youth Camp. Instead of aiming for “the best ever,” our goal is to build a quality program that will maintain a standard of godly excellence each and every year, for every camper and every staff member who serves at Living Youth Camp.

To achieve this goal, we consistently emphasize a set of true values through the camp standards we teach and train. But these are not just “camp values.” We don't create them in the vacuum of a camp atmosphere. These values are godly values, established in His word. We simply make our best effort to apply them in the camp setting.

For example, we teach the biblical principle of doing things in an organized and peaceful way. Instead of just haphazardly pointing campers toward different activity areas and telling them to have fun, activity leaders each create a plan to guide the campers through organized learning. This is not just a “camp principle.” It's a godly principle. Paul instructed the brethren at Corinth to do things “decently and in order,” reminding them that “God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40).

Engaging for Every Camper

On our roster of physical activities this year, we had basketball, volleyball, swimming, canoeing, and a new activity—disc golf. But not every camper enjoys every sport. In fact, some have very little experience in *any* sport. So, activity leaders bear in mind the importance of making their activity engaging and beneficial for every camper, no matter their age, skill, or experience.

This means that some campers need to be given more one-on-one attention and coaching in the basics. On the other hand, campers with more expertise are taught to be team players who help and encourage others. But to accommodate the needs of *every* camper, each activity leader needs to think through how to organize each step of the class, prepare his activity team to carry out the plan, and then energize each dorm of campers as they arrive. The benefit we have at our teen camp is that our activity leaders, no matter what sport they teach, are dedicated to taking the time to prepare, plan, and apply their camp experience to create the best activities they can—doing things decently, in order, and without confusion.

This same value is shared by the teachers leading our non-athletic activities. This summer, dance, communication, Bible, music, and life-roles classes filled out this part of our program. As instructors prepared their classes, they considered how to organize their activity so that every camper benefited. This takes a lot more time, creativity, and energy than simply showing up. And they put their hearts into it!

Our service departments complete the picture. Our kitchen personnel, logistics team, medical staff, and transportation team spend a great deal of time considering how best to serve the campers as well as *all* the staff. The kitchen director and his team begin to plan months ahead of time, thinking through every aspect of the food—how it can be ordered, delivered, prepared, and served. Consider the task of serving three meals each day to more than 200 people for two weeks. It is a job that not many people would want on their plate! Yet this is what our kitchen team does each year—and they do it decently, in order, without confusion, and in peace.

A Vision for Camp

This year, we had milder weather than usual for camp. Of course, “mild” in East Texas simply translates to temperatures lower than 100°F! But slightly cooler temperatures were definitely conducive to a pleasant atmosphere. And we appreciated Lone Star Camp's improved facilities—the air-conditioned meeting hall where we held our Christian Living classes each morning contributed to an enjoyable start to the day.

But if there is one element that God has blessed us with that makes the biggest difference, it is a staff that shares a

common vision of working together to support and uphold godly values in action. This summer, we experienced one of the best teen camps in recent memory. But our goal is, has been, and will continue to be to keep building a summer program for our youth that will reflect godly excellence. See you at camp! (LN)







Adventure Camp 2025: Voyageurs National Park

By **Jonathan Bueno**

Twenty-three campers and staff completed this year's Adventure Camp at the end of June, canoeing through the beautiful tapestry of lakes, wetlands, and forests of Voyageurs National Park, Minnesota. Following equipment dispersal, training, and orientation, nine canoes in three groups launched from the southeast shore of Kabetogama Lake on a Tuesday afternoon and made it all the way to the south end of Crane Lake by noon on Sunday—more than 50 miles of paddling to the various campsites and points of interest. The eventful trip provided a feast for the eyes in all directions, and everyone was thankful for the near-perfect weather God provided for the expedition.

Some trip highlights included fishing, swimming, cliff jumping, braving a small area of rapids, and hearing the eerie—yet beautiful—call of loons. (If you've never heard a loon, I'd recommend an Internet search on "loon calls.") All three groups came together for afternoon canoe games and evening meals, as well as an enjoyable Sabbath rest at peaceful and scenic Mukooda Lake.

Although small in scale, the Adventure Camps serve an important function among the Living Youth Programs. These trips expose our young people to living outdoors, allow them to prepare for and face difficult challenges, train them to work better as a team, and give them an opportunity to build friendships and grow in appreciation for the Creator and His creation.

Knowing Their Creator Through the Creation

When he was young, perhaps just in his late teens, King David wrote, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:3–5). At an early age, David developed a very real relationship with His Creator that prepared him to be used by God in a powerful way. We should not disregard the connection between David's faith and his many hours spent

outdoors as a shepherd, contemplating the great Creator through His creation.

Adventure Camp gives our young people the opportunity to spend many hours surrounded by God's creation. Though it is a group activity, there are many opportunities for the campers to muse upon the works of His hands while paddling through a peaceful lake, camping on the shore, enjoying a spectacular sunset, or sitting around the glowing embers of the campfire as the night sky darkens and a clear view of myriad stars develops.

Being up close and personal with God's creation, one can't help but think of David's words, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard" (Psalm 19:1–3). These moments aren't soon forgotten, and they are paired with daily Bible Studies about the God of Creation and His plan for our lives.

Facing and Overcoming Challenges

A character in a Robert Frost poem observed, "The best way out is always through." Life deals challenges to all of us, and the best way to deal with adversity is often to face it head-on. Our young people are not exempt from this fact of life, nor can we shield them from all the harshness of Satan's world. This is especially true if they expect to be disciples of Jesus Christ, who will suffer persecution from this world (2 Timothy 3:12).

Adventure Camp is therefore a valuable tool in teaching our young people to do things both physically and mentally challenging. More than just "getting outside," Adventure Camp exposes our young people to raw wilderness and total immersion in the creation. It's beautiful, but campers work hard for those picturesque views. The trip was no "stroll in the park," and campers and staff agreed to prepare ahead of time so their bodies would be physically up to the task. Paddling two- or three-person canoes full of gear is no easy chore; it requires proper technique, muscle power, and determination. Spiritual parallels abound, including the grit and determination Paul used to bring his body—his actions—into submission to God's way of life (1 Corinthians 9:27). True

Christianity is not for the faint of heart or for those unwilling to exert effort to be overcomers.

Among the biggest immediate challenges, perhaps more than the daily paddling and exertion, were the buzzing natives of the park—mosquitoes and biting flies—eager to greet us at each campsite, constantly asking us to donate some blood. Mosquito humor aside, they were a test of attitude. But the adversities faced on any given Adventure Camp trip pale in comparison to the feeling of standing atop the proverbial—and sometimes literal—mountain.

Teamwork and Friendship

One of the biggest benefits of LYP camps is the opportunity for our young people to build friendships based upon godly values. The Adventure Camps facilitate deep friendships developed by a small group of people working together as a team over the course of several days. Accomplishing tasks and facing and overcoming adversity together build real bonds of brotherhood. People come to know one another's strengths and weaknesses and must learn to get along, sometimes overlooking peculiarities and character flaws, while appreciating each team member's contribution.

Campers and staff had to work together to paddle in unison, which is not as easy as it sounds and requires diligent communication. Each group also worked together daily to set up and take down its campsites, cook meals, wash dishes, filter water, make fires, and help each other in and out of canoes. At the end of each day, each group enjoyed the sight, sound, and smell of a crackling fire amidst the sounds of the wilderness—and, of course, one another's company.

Sometimes campers and staff bring unique skills that benefit the group, but it is the work of every person contributing to the team that makes Adventure Camp special. It's a microcosm of what God is accomplishing in His Church: "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Romans 12:4–5).

A well-deserved shoutout goes to our hardworking basecamp support staff, who helped with equipment inventory, meals, and transportation. Adventure Camp 2025 will be well remembered by those who participated. Memories were made, friendships were formed and strengthened—and, above all, the character of Jesus Christ was further fashioned in His people through time spent in the wilderness. (LN)



The 2025 Living Youth Camp in Belgium

By **Dinah Winnail**

The Living Youth Camp in Chevetogne, Belgium, this year took place from Monday, July 28, to Monday, August 4. We refer to it as our European camp, but it encompasses far more territory—campers traveled from Belgium, France, Germany, Martinique, French Guiana, Congo-Brazzaville, and the United Kingdom. Staff added even more variety with two staff members from South Africa, as well as Mr. Rod McNair and the family of Mr. and Mrs. Jake and Julia Boyer from the United States. No fewer than four continents were represented this year!

This year's camp comprised 19 campers, 28 staff members, and two young future campers. The attendance was officially bilingual, with French and English spoken. Everyone arrived on Monday afternoon, and after settling into the dorms, we had dinner, followed by orientation.

Each day at camp began with a delicious breakfast prepared by the wonderful kitchen staff. Then, we moved on to Christian Living class, focused on this year's camp theme, "Proverbs: Wisdom for Life." Each day, a minister brought out a specific lesson from the book of Proverbs to encourage campers and staff to seek wisdom and grow in the proper fear of the Eternal God.

After class, a full day of activities began. Football, flag rugby, capture the flag, indoor noodle hockey, ping-pong, netball, and bivouacking kept the campers busy at having fun, learning new skills, and working together. The campers even learned a sport that was new to everyone—soccer tennis.

But sports were not the only activities. Campers had music classes, and in choir they learned a song for special music on the Sabbath. In dance, they learned and practiced couples dances as well as line dances. We enjoyed an astronomy lesson one evening, followed by time under the night sky to identify constellations and planets with the help of a digital app. Campers also had another Bible class as a part of the Scripture Education Program.

On Wednesday, the campers and staff toured the Caves of Han, a large cave system with a fascinating light show deep within. This was followed by a zip-line adventure through the

trees, and the day ended with a drive through a wildlife park featuring European animals, including gray and Arctic wolves and some very active brown bears. It was a day to remember for all!

During the rest of the week, staff demonstrated flexibility and organization when activities had to be rearranged to avoid rainstorms. The rain, however, could not put a damper on the enthusiasm. Of special note is that although rain had been predicted for the whole day on Friday, God intervened and gave us a beautiful sunny day that allowed our activities to go forward as planned.

The Sabbath brought a welcome respite from so much vigorous activity. We all enjoyed a brunch with homemade crepes, followed by a Bible Study and hymn sing. Sabbath services were streamed to congregations throughout the French-speaking world, and the campers performed in French and English the song they had learned in choir class. It was a beautiful offering to our Father in Heaven. After services, we enjoyed yet more fellowship with some delightful refreshments. We played some challenging and enjoyable Bible games after dinner, and we ended the day with evening reflection and a hymn.

Another encouraging activity was an evening of heart-to-heart conversation—the men with the boys and the women with the girls. We sat together as the adults discussed why they have chosen to remain in God's Church and way of life. The purpose of this discussion was for the campers to learn effective ways of defending against Satan's attempts to pull us away from God's truth.

Friendship and fellowship abounded throughout the camp, and it was inspiring to see the way God helped us all to communicate. It was a true blessing to experience how God's Spirit makes us family even when we speak different languages and come from different parts of the world. The enthusiasm of the campers grew as they worked and played together while building friendships.

The 2025 Living Youth Camp in Belgium was an experience to remember. God's blessings were bountiful, and the friendships and camaraderie among the campers and staff will continue long past the camp's end. We are all grateful to have been part of such an inspiring and uplifting week. (L)



Every Day: “Your Kingdom Come”

By Josh Lyons

Long ago, one of Jesus’ disciples asked Him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). The gospels of Matthew and Luke record His response, which carries profound lessons.

One lesson about an important aspect of our conversations with our Heavenly Father comes in the very first request of Jesus’ model prayer, “Your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). Jesus taught that this request is one of the first and most important elements of a Christian’s prayers, and much of the Bible explains that it should be a heartfelt part of our supplications before God. Asking God that His Kingdom may come, and come soon, should be one of our most frequent and fervent requests of our Father.

“Your kingdom come” expresses our fervent desire for God to send His Son to establish His Kingdom on earth—that most vital part of His plan for the future of this world. The Apostle John expresses this desire at the very end of the Bible: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20). This simple request contains profound meaning because it expresses a longing, a pursuit, and a hope for a better world.

We might wonder why Jesus taught His followers to pray this, and why it’s even the very first part of the model prayer after addressing and honoring God the Father. One reason is that He wants His disciples to share His desire to relieve the world’s suffering and to feel the compassion and empathy He shares with God the Father (Lamentations 3:22; Matthew 9:36; Philippians 2:4–5). As much as we may yearn, God the Father and Jesus Christ yearn even more for the time when they will end the world’s suffering; “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

“Kingdoms” That End Only in Suffering

For generations, mankind has endured extreme suffering caused by the plagues of war, violence, hunger, sickness, and death. No king, president, government, nation, or empire has been able to cure these intractable problems. We all see suffering every day—in our own lives, in our neighborhoods, in our countries, and as reported in the news around the world.

Suffering doesn’t just happen on a large scale, as when thousands or millions are affected by wars, natural disasters, man-made catastrophes, unrest, or persecution. Sometimes, it’s helpful to consider the *individual* suffering that many endure, day in and day out, through all the familiar woes—

health, finances, and personal tragedies alike. This reminds us that real people have real tears and feel real pain. Consider the millions around the world who are still suffering from the horrid effects of war, to which our modern century is clearly not immune.

Talking some years ago with an elderly individual who was dealing with physical pain caused by health challenges, I heard this person make a simple comment that has stayed with me. After a description of some recent physical struggles came a remark made plainly and without exaggeration: *I don’t like pain*. Surely, every human being—no matter one’s nationality, ethnicity, race, or religion—can relate to that simple statement. Having empathy for others and remembering that no one *wants* to suffer or experience pain can motivate and remind us to often pray those important three words Christ taught many years ago to a disciple who asked Him how to pray: “Your kingdom come.”

Our world is suffering under the sway of a rebellious influence, which the Bible identifies as Satan, the devil (Genesis 3:1–7; Revelation 12:9). Disobeying God is sin (1 John 3:4), and sin always causes human beings to suffer. Satan’s way doesn’t work, and as the temporary ruler of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4), he has created a “kingdom” of suffering and evil. Many passages in Scripture explain how the Kingdom of God will rule a world where there is no suffering—the opposite of our current world (Isaiah 35; Revelation 21:4). Satan’s influence and his kingdom will be replaced by a Kingdom that will be infinitely superior in every way.

Never-Ending Righteousness

The Kingdom of God is one of the Bible’s central topics, the focus of many prophecies. It has been the ultimate hope of God’s people throughout the centuries since Christ walked this earth, for it was the heart of the message He preached (Luke 4:43) and the subject of many of His parables. Jesus said we must seek it first, above all else (Matthew 6:33). He said it is like a treasure hidden in a field and that procuring that treasure is worth giving up everything else. He compared it to a beautiful pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44–46). It’s what He will bring when He returns as the King of kings (Revelation 11:15; 19:16).

Not everyone knows about the Kingdom of God, but everyone wants what it will bring—peace, prosperity, truth, health, righteous leadership, and relief from pain. The suffering and evil we see in the world should drive us to yearn for that Kingdom to come soon. These reasons and many more are why we should fervently pray, every day, “Your kingdom come.” (L)

2024 Financial Audit in Review

By **D. Jerry Ruddlesden**

The Living Church of God publishes its audited financial statements each year. The complete *Living Church of God (International), Inc. and Affiliates Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Schedules* can be found online, at the bottom of the LCG.org/about-us page. Our 2024 audit was performed by McCannon, Rogers, Driscoll, & Associates, L.L.P. Once again, we received an “unqualified” opinion. This means we received a report with no “qualifications”—that is, no objections or hesitations. Here is what the Report of Independent Auditor stated: “In our opinion, the consolidated financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Church as of December 31, 2024, and the changes in net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.”

The total income in the U.S. for 2024 was \$24,686,406. This represents a 3.67 percent increase in overall income over 2023. The increase in regular offerings was 5.03 percent. The breakdown of our 2024 expenses into our three main programs includes \$11,092,752 (41.97 percent) for Preaching the Gospel, \$13,440,780 (50.86 percent) for Feeding the Flock, and \$1,895,170 (7.17 percent) for Administration. These percentages vary each year depending on the timing of expenses and needs of each program area. Non-members continue to be an important part of our support.

It is amazing to think of how the combined tithes and offerings of our small flock impact the sowing and reaping of God’s word that we call the “Work.” Your generous support allowed for \$2,375,545 in direct spending on television broadcasting and resulting telephone responses. It allowed us to

print more than 3,000,000 magazines, as well as thousands of booklets, *Bible Study Course* lessons, and other printed materials. Total print and associated costs for 2024 amounted to \$2,193,769. We also spent \$877,381 on Internet advertising. The cost of postage has been rising steadily, outpacing inflation, and we are monitoring it closely. Mr. Darren Brinson and his staff in the Mail Processing Department diligently look for savings in how we package and mail our material.

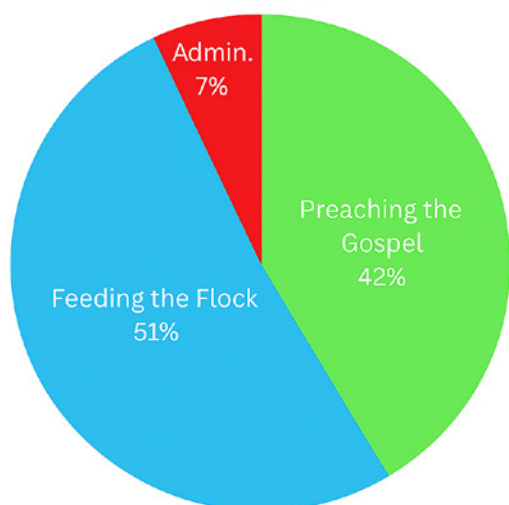
Hall rental for Sabbath services is another area that has increased more than inflation during the past three years. We spent \$1,701,626 in hall rental for 2024. Please pray that we find affordable halls in safe areas that are centrally located to serve the needs of our brethren on the weekly Sabbath and on Holy Days.

Because our members faithfully give, including the Third-Year Tithe, our combined resources allowed us to assist members in need, widows, retired ministers, and our international offices in the amount of \$2,230,190 in 2024.

Composing this brief summary requires a lot of figures and percentages—but though numbers and dollars are a mechanism to accomplish our mission and evaluate what we are doing, they are not what the Work is about. The Work is about warning the world, preaching the good news of God’s coming Kingdom, teaching those whom God calls, and feeding His precious flock. In our troubled, dark world, we must not forget that we are the lights set on a hill. We can take heart and be encouraged by the Apostle Paul’s plea: “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (Colossians 4:2–4). Paul was in chains, imprisoned in Rome, when he wrote those words. Even so, his heart’s desire was to do the Work. As bond-servants, we are all pressed into this service even today. Our hearts, our efforts, and our resources combine to do this Work.

Please continue to pray for God’s guidance on His human leadership here in the U.S. and around the world. Decisions are made almost every day about the direction of the overall Work and about the individual programs that contribute to it. The weekly *World Ahead* update provides a glimpse into these programs: *Tomorrow’s World* presentations; youth camps; Feast preparations; ministerial hires, moves, and travels; reports from international offices; and so much more. Behind all these efforts are many decisions and a great deal of organizing and planning. Our combined prayers and support are vital for us to achieve any modicum of success, for we know that even our greatest efforts are just tools in God’s hands—He is ultimately the one who gives us the vision and power to succeed. (LN)

2024 Program Expenses





TITUS 2:3-5

Woman to Woman

Faith as a Little Child

By **Amber Leonard**

Our children are the future of God's Church, as intimidating as that may seem to us right now. What they become as adults is of utmost importance to the Church and to the soon-coming Kingdom of God. In their impressionable young lives, our children will imitate what they are exposed to as they grow, for good or ill. And one of the most powerful examples children will ever have is that of their parents. The responsibility of parenthood should reach far beyond our desire to keep our children alive and fed. More importantly, we have the calling as parents to show them our *faith* in living God's way and our *trust* in Him throughout our daily lives.

As mothers, we are in many ways the first line of defense for our children in this world. We are generally at home with our children more often in their early years, and as such we have a very important role in leading and guiding them by our example. As they say, "Actions speak louder than words." What actions can we take to help develop our children's faith?

Point Out His Protection

When my children and I get in the car for an outing around town, we always pause for a moment to pray for protection and for God to work things out for the best on our trip. This is one way we strive to remember, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Many times, when we have prayed for protection, God has very clearly answered—for example, opening a wide space for us so we could safely enter the highway at a very high-traffic time. There have been other times when we could have been in a major accident, but out of nowhere someone pulled out in front of us and slowed us down before we came upon an accident that had happened just ahead. These times provide perfect opportunities to point out to our children that God is faithful in protecting us. Even if we do have an accident, but God protects us from major harm, we can teach faith by highlighting to our children that He kept us safe from something worse.

Share the Stories

Bible stories are an excellent tool for teaching our children that God is always there for us. The accounts of how God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, of how He saved Noah and his family, and of so many other miracles He used to bless His people who followed Him in faith are *absolutely true*, and they are beneficial for us mothers to read or paraphrase to our children at bedtime or throughout the day. These stories set a lasting foundation for our children to build upon throughout their lives, and relating them is one way we can obey the command God gives us in Deuteronomy 6:6-8: "These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes."

We all have stories of how God saved us in times of trouble, and our own accounts of deliverance can be powerful illustrations to our children. We can share with them how God directed our steps to be in His Church and how He provided safety and healing for us in times past. These stories will show them that God is still at work in our lives today, as He was with the people in the Bible.

One example my children love to hear is how, when I was a toddler, I crawled through my grandmother's kitchen and pulled myself up on a chair where a large metal rotating fan sat running. As I inadvertently unbalanced it, it fell over towards me, but before it could crush me, something unseen moved the fan over and it crashed to the floor a couple of feet away from me instead. My mother was there to witness this event taking place, and she shared it with me as a child. This helped build my faith.

My children also love to hear stories of how God protected *them* from disaster. For instance, my oldest child experienced a similarly close call. One day, I was cleaning the living room and had left the vacuum cleaner standing in the middle of the room while I dusted elsewhere. My daughter, who was still very new to walking, toddled over to our vacuum cleaner and grabbed hold of it. She began to lose her balance and held on to the heavy vacuum, but it was not stable enough to support her.

I stood across the room, frozen in fear, watching what should have been a very bad situation. It was as if everything happened in slow motion: She fell backwards, the vacuum falling with her—but instead of landing on her as it should have, it turned slightly and fell beside her. She rolled over and sat up as if nothing had even occurred—but, as a mother with a pounding heart knows, something big had just happened.

These are seemingly small examples of God's protection, and we all have many more stories of how He shielded us from harm in more serious situations—it is important for us to share these happenings, large and small, with our children. These stories will increase their faith, help them see how God protects His people in bad situations, and be a guide for them in the future as they face their own trials and need His protec-

tion, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:12–19).

Learn from Their Faith

As mothers, it is very rewarding and encouraging when we begin to see in our children the evidence of faith that we have worked so hard to instill. For example, my children are good at reminding me if I forget to say a prayer before leaving the driveway or

As mothers, it is very rewarding and encouraging when we begin to see in our children the evidence of faith that we have worked so hard to instill. For example, **my children are good at reminding me if I forget to say a prayer before leaving the driveway or before a lunchtime meal.**

before a lunchtime meal. Then there are times when they come to me to describe how they prayed about a problem and God answered them with a solution. When they are taught to look, your children will begin to see situations where God answers their prayers and protects or heals them, and they will point

these answered prayers out to *you*. Sometimes it is *they* who teach *us* through their example of faith.

We see that God rewards our children's faith because He has a tender spot in His heart for them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it" (Luke 18:16–17).

Stop and Give Thanks

We as mothers must be vigilant to teach our children that when we are protected or healed by God, we should not forget to stop and tell Him, "Thank You!" Sometimes protection comes instantly and it is easy to remember to be grateful, but then there are times when we don't realize until later that God watched over us in a situation.

Healing may happen immediately, but it may also come gradually, over a long period of time, and the fact that we have been healed may not come to mind until sometime after. It is especially important in such times to teach our children to recognize that we should thank God for His mercy. We don't want to be guilty of ingratitude when God has blessed us with His protection and healing. Christ's healing of the ten lepers gives us a good example of gratitude and *ingratitude*:

Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of

We as mothers are often our children's very first representation of how faith in God will help them deal with the challenges they will face in life. As they grow, they will see our reliance on God and our gratitude for His blessings of protection and healing, and we hope they will want to follow our example—patterning their lives after ours. Scripture shows us the faith of Abraham, after which we should mold ourselves: "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore 'it was accounted to him for righteousness'" (Romans 4:20–22).

It is our God-given job as mothers to live the way of faith and to give our children's lives a better chance for success by teaching them dependence on God for everything in their lives. We can teach them "living faith" every day by living it ourselves, and we can teach them to be grateful for the blessings that the right way of life bestows on us. With God's help, we can teach our children that faithfully living His way truly works. (LN)

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. Steve and Grace Frederick celebrated their **60th wedding anniversary** on July 31. The couple were presented with a cake, card, and flowers from the Lafayette, Louisiana, congregation, where they attend services.

Mr. and Mrs. Ray and Kathryn Joffrion, of the Baton Rouge, Louisiana, congregation, celebrated their **50th wedding anniversary** this year. They were married on February 7, 1975. They celebrated with brethren on the Sabbath, with cake and pictures, and then later with children, grandchildren, siblings, and their wedding party. Mr. Joffrion serves as an elder and Mrs. Joffrion as a deaconess in the Baton Rouge congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert and Cathern Miller recently celebrated their **60th wedding anniversary**. They were married on August 8, 1965. On the Sabbath, the Baton Rouge, Louisiana, congregation honored them with a cake, a card, and a gift.

Dalton Tanner Mooney and Britni Page Hart were married on August 3 in Locust, North Carolina, witnessed by joyful family and friends. Pastor John Strain officiated their ceremony, which was followed by a delightful and relaxing reception. Mr. and Mrs. Mooney attend the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation. Congratulations to the happy couple!

Tarick F. Walcott and Ansha St. Louis Pascal were joined together in matrimonial happiness on June 29 in Drummondville, Quebec, Canada. Several friends and family made the trip from the southern United States to share the joyous occasion, while scores of additional brethren witnessed the wedding ceremony online, conducted by Pastor Marc Arseneault. The bride and groom are currently seeking permanent residence in the West Palm Beach, Florida, area, where they will attend the Fort Lauderdale congregation.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Adam and Breanne Ajani, of the Edmonton, Alberta, congregation in Canada, are delighted to announce the birth of their first child, **Zachary Dean Ajani**. He was born on July 16 weighing nine pounds, two ounces, and measuring 21.7 inches. Both mom and baby are doing well.

Mr. and Mrs. Caanin and Madeline Fausone wish to announce the arrival of their first child, **Clark David Fausone**. He was born on July 15 weighing ten pounds, five ounces, and measuring 22 inches. The Fausone family attend

the Charlotte congregation in North Carolina

Mr. and Mrs. Jacob and Meagan Hall, of the Edmonton, Alberta, congregation in Canada, are the proud parents of their second daughter and fourth child, **Eliana Grace Hall**. She was born on July 13 weighing nine pounds, two ounces, and measuring 21 inches. Naomi, Samuel, and Ira are delighted with their baby sister!

Mr. and Mrs. Bleys and Erin Hazen are thrilled to announce the birth of their

daughter **Elise James Hazen**. She was born on August 5 weighing nine pounds, six ounces, and measuring 21 inches.

Mr. and Mrs. Hazen, big sister Olive, and baby Elise attend the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Ared and Rebecca Woskanian are thrilled to announce the birth of their second child, **Alexander Robert Woskanian**. He was born on July 7 weighing a healthy 3.1 kilograms (6.8 pounds). The Woskanian family attend the Brisbane, Australia, congregation.

In Loving Memory

Mr. John Bannister, longtime member of the Pontefract, UK, congregation, died on August 5, just a few weeks short of 85 years old. He was the father of Jane Carter, also of the Pontefract congregation, and David Bannister. He is also survived by five grandchildren and a great-grandson. Mr. Bannister was a stalwart in God's truth, and he loved learning and studying about God and His way of life. He was baptized in January of 1974. Mr. Bannister lived a long, rich, and opportunity-filled life, even serving in the government of England for a time. He was preceded in death by his wife, Jean, also a longtime member of God's Church.

Mrs. Mary Branch, 97, died at her home in Kalamazoo, Michigan, on June 20. She married Mr. Marion Branch in 1948, and they raised six children during their 62 years together. They were both baptized into the body of Christ in the 1960s. She had a passion for gardening and enjoyed it until her death. She also enjoyed sewing, genealogy, art, and scrapbooking. Mrs. Branch had a good sense of humor and was a good listener. Others appreciated her ability to give sound guidance in sharing her life experience and Scripture. Preceded in death by her husband in 2011 and by one son, she is survived by four daughters and one son, as well as six grandchildren, five great-grandchildren, four siblings, and several nieces and nephews.

Mr. William "Bill" Coleman, 88, died on July 25. He was a longtime member of God's Church, baptized in 1985, and he served as a deacon in the Atlanta, Georgia, congregation until health issues made doing so unfeasible. Mr. Coleman was known for his generosity, his jokes, and most importantly his intercessory prayers for the brethren. He is survived by his wife, Barbara, and by his Church family. He will be dearly missed.

Mr. Donald Edward Harbison, 92, died on August 15. Mr. Harbison began working at an early age out of necessity. Two of his early undertakings were selling ice cream from a box

he mounted on his bike and working as a golf caddy. Always curious and looking for adventure, he joined the Navy. After his retirement, he went on to work in civil service as an assistant fire chief. He loved gardening and the challenge of fixing things. Mr. Harbison was baptized in 2008 and ordained a deacon in 2017. He was predeceased by his wife, Ruby, and is survived by their daughter, two sons, six grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. The Pensacola, Florida, congregation will also miss him greatly.

Mrs. Carol (Mascari) Norris, 83, died May 21, after an active life of service to God, her family, and God's people. She was born legally blind, but this did not hold her back from living a productive life. In 1960, she married Mr. Mike Norris; they were a team for almost 65 years and were baptized together in 1966. He worked for Ambassador College in Pasadena for a number of years, where they served among the widows and she helped some of the ministers' wives. In 1973, they moved to Lake Tahoe. While there, she learned to ski. Later, they built a home in Eureka, and she helped with everything from concrete to drywall to painting. Mr. and Mrs. Norris were ordained deacon and deaconess in 1988. After his ordination as an elder in 1995, they served in California, Oregon, and Nevada. Mrs. Norris accompanied her husband as he traveled among the congregations in these states. It was a service of love and her life and joy. Besides her husband, she is survived by their son, Sam, and by their daughter, Christina. Mrs. Norris was widely loved and will be greatly missed.

Mr. Philip Steagall, 63, finished his race on May 20, the anniversary of his baptism in 1980. Mr. Steagall was born and raised in God's Church, and he long served the Tucson, Arizona, congregation as a deacon. He enjoyed God's creation through camping, hunting, and fishing, and he enjoyed sharing that joy with others. Survived by his wife of 40 years, Karla (McNair), as well as by three sons and three grandchildren, he will be missed by his family and many friends.

Ordinations

Mr. Jorge Schauback Madrigal was ordained an elder on Pentecost by Evangelists Douglas Winnail and Mario Hernández. Mr. Schauback serves in the San José congregation in Costa Rica.

Mr. Everett McNair was ordained an elder on August 9 by Evangelist Douglas Winnail, Pastor Jonathan Bueno, and Elders Frank Dickinson and Gary Pate. Mr. McNair serves in the Tacoma, Washington, congregation.

The Kindness Your Family Needs

Though *family* should be a word eliciting feelings of safety, security, and cherished memories, many experience family life as a struggle for survival. Under Satan's oppressive influence, cruelty all too often exists in families.

What is the impact of receiving cruel or abusive language from an early age? What can help to prevent or overcome it?

According to *Neuroscience News*, "Research has shown that when words are routinely used by the adults in their lives to humiliate, shame or control children, they can alter the developing brain.... Definitions of verbal abuse vary, but it is generally characterised by a sustained pattern of behaviour where criticism, threats or rejection of the child leads them to feel routinely belittled, blamed, threatened, frightened or ridiculed" (May 11, 2025).

Researchers found that "children who were verbally abused experienced a range of negative consequences throughout their lives—most commonly delinquent behavior, depression, aggression, conduct disorders, substance use, and anger. Other studies linked verbal abuse to depression, abuse perpetration, neurobiological changes, and physical health outcomes including obesity and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease" (*Psychology Today*, October 10, 2023).

What parent's patience has not, regrettably, worn thin at times, resulting in frustrated and hastily spoken words? There is sadly no "unsend" button for unkind speech, though a kind word and sincere apology can help mitigate damage. Do you seek kindness in your speech? Kindness is an intrinsic quality of God's character—an attribute He desires us to develop (Galatians 5:22–23).

All men intent on pleasing God should consider that "what is desired in a man is kindness" (Proverbs 19:22). Additionally, God counsels fathers to be careful with the nature of the words they speak to their children: "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (Colossians 3:21). This discouragement can last a lifetime if the verbal abuse is prolonged and consistent.

All women seeking to be honorable and pleasing to God should consider the exemplary speech He lauds as that of a virtuous woman: "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.... Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: 'Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all'" (Proverbs 31:26–29).

Scripture also commands, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6). Jesus Christ tells us, "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another" (Mark 9:50). Salt-seasoned speech serves as a preservative in friendships, marriages, parent-child relationships, and everything in between. When we are careful with our words—extending courteous, kind, gracious, and empathetic thoughts—the positive impact in the lives of our children, spouses, friends, and coworkers is inestimable.

While many today endure challenging circumstances, we all look forward to the coming time of indescribable peace, beauty, cooperation, and joy when humanity will recognize Christ's kindness and experience its benefits firsthand (Ephesians 2:7). In the meantime, will we foster the enduring quality of kindness? The impact of our kind words may endure far longer than we know—maybe into that very world soon to come.

—Adam J. West