

# THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

LCG.org

March-April 2026

## The Importance of Self-Control

*Dear Brethren,*

Congratulations on reading this first sentence—you have moved past the title! Not everyone who receives our publications takes the time to read them, but apparently you do! New technologies excite and fascinate us, but as I have mentioned from time to time, they also change us—and in ways that we do not always recognize or that are for our good.

Over the last generation, our world has turned more to visual images and sound and away from reading and writing. Radios changed how we received news and how we were entertained, as families huddled around console radios listening to their favorite dramas and comedy programs. One of them went down in history.

On Halloween morning, 1938, Orson Welles awoke to find himself the most talked about man in America. The night before, Welles and his *Mercury Theatre on the Air* had performed a radio adaptation of H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, converting the 40-year-old novel into fake news bulletins describing a Martian invasion of New Jersey. Some listeners mistook those bulletins for the real thing, and their anxious phone calls to police, newspaper offices, and radio stations convinced many journalists that the show had caused nationwide hysteria. By the next morning, the 23-year-old Welles's face and name were on the front pages of newspapers coast-to-coast, along with headlines about the mass panic his CBS broadcast had allegedly inspired ("The Infamous 'War of the Worlds' Radio Broadcast Was a Magnificent Fluke," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 6, 2015).

We may laugh today, but it was no laughing matter to millions at the time. With radio we have to fill in mental images, but movies and television do that for us. With the rise of television, everything from sitcoms to dramas, from sporting events to wars, was brought into our living rooms. No longer did we need to travel away from home to cheer modern gladiators in the Coliseum.

Computers and smartphones continue the trend away from reading, serious analysis, and mental acuity. It is all laid out for us in headlines, sound bites, and pictures. Entertaining? Yes, but at what price? And that brings me to what you are doing right now—*reading*.

### The Need for Focus

Serious reading is giving way to fast-paced visual images and headlines from increasingly suspect sources. While a newspaper opinion page may present two sides of an issue, social media now force-feeds us what an impersonal algorithm thinks we are interested in, whether it is good for us or not. Media executives want to keep us engaged on their platform or device for as long as they can, to promote more money-making ads. These programmed algorithms care nothing for truth or for what is good. We are merely subjects for marketing.

Dear brethren, we must understand how these technologies are transforming us day by day and year by year. They are changing the way we receive information, though it all appears so innocent. Yet most of us believe we are immune to the problem. *It doesn't affect me*, many think. But consider which we find easier: To read the Bible, a booklet, or an article—or to watch a Whiteboard, a Viewpoint, or even a sermon? Human beings will, by nature, take the easy course

Volume 28, No. 2



### Inside This Issue...

*The Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd... p. 3*  
*Humbling and Testing... p. 6*  
*Appreciating Christ's Sacrifice... p. 10*  
*How to Pray When You Are Discouraged... p. 14*

*Unleavened Recipes... p. 16*  
*Local Church News... p. 22*  
*The Danger of Complacency... p. 24*

when given a choice. And, for almost all of us, it is easier to watch or listen to something than to sit down, read an article, and actually put forth the effort to look up the scriptures it cites. Or am I merely projecting my own weaknesses onto you? I doubt it.

This is not God's world but Satan's, and he directs its course. He subtly turns whatever might be used for good into something used to destroy. We are swimming in his world, and his heaven is everywhere. We must therefore evaluate *how* these technologies are changing the ways we think and act, as they surely are. Leading up to and during the Days of Unleavened Bread, the question must be asked and honestly answered: "Is it for my good or not?"

We continue to produce new telecasts, Whiteboards, and Viewpoints, and we hope that all of you will keep up with them as you are able so that you remain invested in how God is working through His Church. Frankly, though, these visual presentations are primarily geared toward an outside audience in an attempt to reach them where they are. Our hope is that our audience will progress to more serious study—reading the Bible, our articles, and our booklets.

Even our audio and video sermons may contribute to laziness. It is one thing to listen to something as we go about our business—mowing the lawn or doing dishes while wearing our earbuds—but quite another to sit down with the Bible and look up the cited scriptures. Please do not misunderstand: Many of us do listen to sermons while relaxing or doing chores, and there is nothing inherently wrong with that. At the same time, I hope that we do not consider that to be of the same worth as giving a sermon our full attention with a Bible open.

It is easy to go through a day occupied with busywork. As many of us know, controlling the amount of time we spend on receiving and answering email and texts can be a daunting task. It is only too easy to open up our messages and spend literal hours on them. Yes, we were busy, but what did we truly produce?

The same is true with our spiritual life. It is easy to be busy, but how much growth takes place? Do we listen to audio files or watch video programs to make ourselves feel as though we are checking a box, when the quality of our efforts

is lower than it could be? And, if we do read, do we engage in thoughtful contemplation to learn from what we have read?

### **We Must Do Our Part**

I am not throwing stones at any of you—I mention these things primarily because I see how easy it is for me to deceive myself, and I am striving to help all of us see how Satan is directing the course of this world and how none of us are immune to his devices. He takes things that are good and turns them into instruments of destruction. That is what he is—a destroyer.

There was an article in the previous *Living Church News* issue titled "Why the Church?" Understanding that topic is crucial for us. When Mr. Herbert Armstrong told Worldwide Church of God members that he thought as many as half of them did not get it—and later that he thought only 10 percent of us got it—he knew what he was talking about. History tells us that his estimate of only 10 percent was closer to the truth. That means almost 90 percent did *not* get it!

Human nature does not change—apart from God's Spirit working in us. We all want to believe we have God's Spirit, and that is likely the case, but simply having God's Spirit is a different matter from stirring it up daily. How many thousands in the Worldwide Church of God thought they "got it"? We are saved by grace—God's unearned pardon—but we must also do our part.

Thankfully, God looks at our efforts, not just our total accomplishments. He knows our frame—read Psalm 103. We all fall short in many ways, and I do not write this to put anyone on a guilt trip or to contribute to the idea that you may not make it. What I am trying to express is that we cannot allow our current technological world to control us; we must control it. Use it, yes. Let it direct our steps, no.

Satan wants us to become spiritually lazy so he can control us. It is up to us, with God's help, to overcome our naturally lazy tendencies. We must learn to think, to analyze—and to do so means we must learn to exercise self-control. We must never lose sight of the big picture.



**Editor in Chief:** | Gerald E. Weston  
**Executive Editor:** | Wallace G. Smith  
**Managing Editor:** | John Robinson  
**Senior Editor:** | William Bowmer  
**Regional Editors:** | Robert Tyler (Australasia)  
 | Stuart Wachowicz (Canada)  
 | Peter G. Nathan (Europe and Africa)  
**Editorial Assistants:** | William Williams • Thomas White  
**Asst. Copy Editors:** | Sandy Davis • Genie Ogwyn • Linda Orban  
**Business Manager:** | Dexter B. Wakefield

*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.

©2026 Living Church of God™. Printed in the USA. All rights reserved. Postage paid at Charlotte, NC.

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

The Living Church of God is not responsible for the return of unsolicited articles and photographs. All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version (© 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.). Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Image(s) used under license from Shutterstock.com.



## The Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd

**J**ohn 3:16 is a verse that Satan has used extensively to mislead the world. You can see it behind goalposts, behind home plate, on billboards along the highway, or painted on rocks. Many people think they understand this verse—they could probably quote it by heart. But as brought out in our booklet *John 3:16: Hidden Truths of the Golden Verse*, Satan can put this verse in front of people's eyes while hiding its full meaning from them.

"For God so loved the world," people recite, but they do not know who or what God is, nor do they understand His love. The love of God is "that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3), but most "Christians" believe that at least the Fourth Commandment *is* burdensome—and often the Second Commandment, depending on how attached they are to using idols or icons in worshipping their understanding of God.

People quote that God "loved the world," but they don't recognize what this means: that God will give everyone an opportunity, that He has not cast off forever those who now are Muslim, Hindu, or in various other religions—people who, in many cases throughout history, have never even heard the name of Jesus Christ. Satan does not want people to truly understand that God has a plan and a purpose and that He is working out a real opportunity for every human being.

Many nod their heads to the fact that God "gave His only begotten Son," yet they think only about what *Jesus* did, not considering the Father's role—that God the Father was the One who gave His Son as a sacrifice for the world. As any parent knows, if you had to watch your child go through something like that, it would be agonizing. People dismiss the Father as the "Old Testament God," not realizing who the God of the Old Testament actually is. They look to Christ and think only of "what He's done for me," not understanding that we must have a living faith, not a dead faith.

Millions believe that God gave His Son so "that whoever believes in Him should not perish," but they don't even understand what it *means* to perish, thinking that perishing instead means to live forever in hellfire. A billion years squared—and more than that—is a long time of torment for anything one can do wrong during one's short time on Earth! And while so many look forward to

"everlasting life," they do not truly understand the great reward that God offers His children. It's amazing how much deception there can be about one verse—a verse that everyone thinks he understands.

### Their Loving Sacrifice

The Passover is all about God's love, His sacrifice, and the fact that we can escape perishing. As we approach it, it's helpful to examine Jesus Christ's role as both the Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd—and explore what He may have been thinking during that supreme trial, while He was hanging on the stake.

At this time of year, we often read about the original Passover of Exodus 12, which took place nearly 1,500 years before Christ suffered and died on our behalf. But another verse we read when approaching the Passover reminds us that "indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus was sacrificed on the very day of the Passover—just as the original Passover pictured the Lamb of God being slain so our sins could be covered. In Exodus, after each household took a lamb, they put the blood of that lamb over the door and on the two side posts, and any firstborn inside was spared. Israel was God's firstborn, and we are God's *spiritual* firstborn—we must be covered by the blood of the Lamb as well.

What did Jesus endure for us? What did His Father go through? Crucifixion is an awful torture—you would hang from your hands until you couldn't stand the pain anymore, then you would push up on your feet to relieve your hands, but that would cause pain in your feet. You would go back and forth, always hurting more.

Jesus went through that, and He knew in advance what was going to take place. During His lifetime, He very likely saw individuals hanged on stakes. That may be part of the reason why, on the night He was taken into custody, "He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed" (Matthew 26:37). Jesus prayed three times about what He would suffer (vv. 39–44)—and no wonder, because He knew what was coming. He could picture it in His mind. Even before He experienced it, He understood enough about crucifixion to know that it was going to be excruciatingly painful. Scripture says that He learned by the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). As we approach Passover, we're reminded of the love of God—of God the Father and of Christ—in going through this for us.

What was Jesus thinking during this supreme trial? The Bible gives us a clue.

### **We Can Be Confident**

The Member of the Godhead who spoke to the children of Israel was not the Father—it was the Word, who became Jesus Christ. We read, “Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel” (Exodus 24:9–10). Yet, according to Jesus, no one “has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father” (John 6:46). Scripture shows that Christ was the God of the Old Testament by telling us that the children of Israel “drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4).

Christ inspired the writings of the Old Testament—and in the New Testament we read, “Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Matthew 27:46). He was quoting from Psalm 22, which begins with the words Jesus spoke on the stake: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Why did Christ cry out these words? He did so because God is “of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on wickedness” (Habakkuk 1:13). He cannot look on sin, and we read that “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus took the penalty of sin, which required death, so we could be made righteous through Him. It was not the law of God that was nailed to the stake—it was sin, represented by Jesus. He never sinned, yet at that moment He represented sin.

We read that “He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5). Some object to the idea that the Father forsook Christ on the stake, and they may quote that verse along with Joshua 1:5. But the One who spoke those words was *Christ*—and He spoke them to man, not to Himself. In truth, the ultimate penalty for sin is to be cut off from God—and since Christ represented sin He did, for a short time, experience God turning His back on Him.

After we receive God’s Spirit—that down payment on eternal life—we are truly under grace, not under the penalty of the law. Of course, we must continually strive to obey God with a repentant attitude, but we should also be positive and not fearful—not becoming paranoid over whether we have an unnoticed sin that we haven’t repented of. If that were enough to keep us out of God’s Kingdom, we’d *all* be lost, because none of us are aware of all the sins we’ve committed.

If we are striving to obey God and have accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, we are under the blood of Christ, and we can be confident. We don’t have to constantly worry, living under a cloud, thinking, *I wonder if I’ll make it*. Of course, we can still disqualify ourselves by turning away from God—Hebrews 6 and 10 show that. But if we are striving to do what

is right, examining ourselves, seeing things we need to change, and overcoming, we will make it. God is able to save us!

### **Two Prophetic Psalms**

Very clearly, Psalm 22 was prophetic of the Messiah, and it tells us what Jesus was likely thinking as He was on the stake. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent. But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel” (vv. 1–3). Though the Father had to forsake Christ in that moment, Christ didn’t forsake the Father.

We see an obvious connection to Christ’s crucifixion throughout this psalm. “I am a worm,” it says, “and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, ‘He trusted in the LORD—let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him’” (vv. 6–8). This is almost word-for-word what we read of in the accounts of Christ’s experience (see Matthew 27:42–43).

Interestingly, Psalm 22:10 reads, “I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother’s womb You have been My God.” God the Father impregnated Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit—He was, of course, Christ’s Father from the womb—yet His people still derided Him just as the psalmist foretold.

Psalm 23 is likely the most famous psalm—just as John 3:16 is likely the most famous individual verse. Considering this, we must understand that the spirit being who currently rules as the god of this world is able to take something with powerful and positive meaning and obscure it, making it so commonplace that millions of people, though they think they know it, do not really understand its profound significance. The late Mr. John Ogwyn pointed out in one of his many Bible Studies that while Psalm 22 reflects what Jesus may have been thinking as He was dying on the stake, Psalm 23 seems to reflect His thoughts about presenting Himself to the Father as the wave sheaf offering after His resurrection. Psalm 22 and Psalm 23 go together—Psalm 22 reflects a sense of being forsaken, while Psalm 23 reflects the recognition that God is the source of salvation.

In Psalm 23, we see this recognition result in exaltation: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” or be in need. “He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me” (vv. 1–4). We are God’s sheep. He leads us in the paths of righteousness, but we all go through very difficult times in life. The Shepherd leads His sheep through narrow passages where there might be creatures that could harm them. He knows where the pitfalls are, where the cliffs drop off. He leads us carefully through.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (v. 5). God nourishes His people physically and spiritually—even in the presence of enemies while we live in Satan’s world. “You anoint my head with oil” (v. 5). God takes care of us, tending to the bruises and cuts that come along our way.

“My cup runs over” (v. 5)—we all have an abundance of blessings, especially when we consider that none of us deserves anything but death. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (v. 6). One can see how Christ could have been thinking about these words after He was resurrected—remembering that He had inspired them—and looking forward to appearing before His Father.

### The Wave Sheaf Fulfillment

God describes the wave sheaf offering, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it’” (Leviticus 23:10–11). We see that the wave sheaf would have been waved on the day we call Sunday.

“And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD.... You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God” (vv. 12–14). In other words, the Israelites could begin the harvest, but they couldn’t eat of it until after the wave sheaf was offered.

In the New Testament, we see that Jesus, on that Sunday morning—having been resurrected the day before—still had to ascend to His Father.

Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and... she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God’” (John 20:11–17).

Before Christ could be touched, He had to be formally accepted by God the Father as the perfect sacrifice. The ful-

fillment had come to pass of what the wave sheaf offering had always pictured.

The same day, “as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, ‘Rejoice!’ So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him” (Matthew 28:9). By this time, Christ had ascended to the Father and returned to the earth. He didn’t want anyone to touch Him before He was “waved” before His Father, but afterward He allowed His disciples to hold His feet. It’s difficult to believe that Psalm 23 was not on His mind as He waited to ascend as the wave sheaf.

### He Knows His Sheep

Jesus was both the Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd. We read that “John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29). He had to be that perfect sacrificial lamb that had been pictured by the Passover in Exodus 12.

Isaiah wrote that “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). Jesus was truly the perfect sacrificial lamb, which is why we are told that “indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). The word translated “sacrificed” here literally means *slaughtered*, as an animal is slaughtered for an offering.

Yet, at the same time, Christ is also our Shepherd, even as the Father was His Shepherd. Notice: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). We are all guilty of sin. We have all gone astray, like sheep. Despite that truth, Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

When we meditate on Christ’s statement, it’s helpful to remember what we read in Psalm 23 about what the Good Shepherd does—what Christ does for each of us, His sheep. As Jesus said next, “A hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own” (John 10:12–14).

The Passover is approaching, reminding us that Jesus Christ is both the Lamb of God—who takes away the sins of the world—and the Good Shepherd, who cares for those who are His sheep. He watches over and knows all of us who make up His flock. He laid down His life for a world of sheep gone astray—so that all people, everywhere, could eventually be given an opportunity. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). LN

# Humbling and Testing

By **Rod McNair**

**W**hy would an all-powerful Being humble and test His people? Humbling doesn't sound very fun, especially in our day and age, when humility is not a value that's highly prized.

Usually, people value confidence—their belief in themselves. Yes, confidence in a right way has its place, but a far more important value is humility.

We understand that part of God's program is to get the leaven out of our character, to help us become a little less puffed up with each passing year—a little less quick to judge others, a little less quick to react when we're offended, a little less quick to assume someone is out to get us. But do we appreciate *why* He wants to humble us? Is God playing with human beings in the way that a five-year-old might play with a bug on the concrete, poking at it just to see what it will do?

Not at all! God has a purpose for us, and to achieve that purpose He humbles us and tests us for our greater good. Testing may not sound very fun, but we are tested for a wonderful purpose. When we were in school, our teachers would give us tests from time to time. Some were difficult, but we don't think our teachers were testing us because they hated us—they knew we needed to be tested to show that we had mastery of the subject. And we know that when we were tested, it was for our good.

Testing shows us what we've learned. How many of us would want to drive over a bridge that was designed, built, and overseen by someone who had read the book but had never taken any tests in engineering school? I'd want to know that the engineer had been rigorously tested—that he'd retained more than book learning, that he knew how to *apply* what he had learned.

As we enter this special time of examining our lives, let's also examine why God humbles and tests His people—so that we can develop a greater understanding of why trials are an integral part of the Christian life.

## **Humbled in the Wilderness**

The Israelites' 40 years in the wilderness were a time of testing and trial. God humbled them and allowed them to be tested for a purpose. Let's remember what the ancient Israelites went through:

And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and to test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:2–3).

Notice that God allowed the Israelites to hunger, but He didn't let them starve. They may not have had the exact kinds of food they wanted, but they had what they needed. God was taking care of them through their trial. He wanted the Israelites to learn some really deep spiritual lessons from the physical events that were happening around them. The manna falling from the sky was meant to help them understand that God was taking care of them. He was their Father. He was their Guide. He was their Protector. He was with them—He would never leave them or forsake them.

And the manna itself had to do with obeying God. Consider how God's provision of the manna is first explained. The Israelites had just come out of Egypt, and we read:

Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." Then the LORD said to Moses, "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" (Exodus 16:2–4).

God was testing them: Would they gather the manna every day? Would they refrain from storing extra for the next morning? You know what happened when they tried to store

extra—it bred worms and stank. Would they try to gather manna on the Sabbath? Some tried, but there was no manna to be found. God was teaching His people to follow His directions. It wasn't just about some food. God was saying, in effect, *It's not about the physical thing I'm providing for you. I'm trying to show you who I am. I'm trying to show you what I'm doing in your life. And I am the one you should have your eyes on.* The metaphor was powerful—this was bread *falling out of the sky from God*. Yet they didn't understand.

Let's get a little context about this manna. What was this *awful* food God was feeding the Israelites, and why were they so distressed? “Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes’” (Numbers 11:4–6).

It's amazing how easily we can come to take blessings for granted. The Israelites lamented having *nothing to eat*—except for bread that miraculously fell out of the sky six days a week, without fail, and twice as much on Friday so they wouldn't have to collect food on the Sabbath. And how is it described? “Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium. The people went about and gathered it, ground it on millstones or beat it in the mortar, cooked it in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil. And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it” (Numbers 11:7–9).

For a people wandering in the wilderness, that sounds pretty good, doesn't it? And it was food coming down from the heavens—it was miraculous. Yet it wasn't exactly what the Israelites wanted, so they came to despise it.

What about us, today? When God is taking care of us, sometimes it's in ways we don't want. Sometimes it's in ways we don't value. Yet God *is* providing our needs.

### What Is in Our Heart?

Do we have a better perspective than that of the Israelites? Or do we sometimes think, *God, this is not the way I envisioned my life. This trial I'm in, this test I'm facing—this is not what I signed up for. This is not what I want. I'm not having a whole lot of fun right now.* Looking back, we see that God was guiding the Israelites through their lives as He humbled and tested them. He knew what was best. He takes care of us, too—but it's not always in the way we expect or even want. And if we're not careful, the care we didn't envision can become so overwhelming that we forget everything He is doing for us, whatever the issue may be—maybe personal problems or relationship challenges, or maybe financial difficulties. Maybe our

budget runs out before the month does, and it's distressing. Maybe we're sick and struggling—maybe chronically, maybe seriously. And it's easy for one trial to become so overwhelming that we forget everything else that God is doing for us.

God wants to know what is in our heart. And that's exactly how He was working with the Israelites as they came out of Egypt. But, for us, the stakes are even higher. God is preparing to give us eternal life, and He wants to see what we are going to do with it. He doesn't want to give eternal life to individuals who'll stage a rebellion, as Lucifer did. He's never again going to allow that to happen.

As we prepare for the Passover, we should reflect on this. We should ask ourselves, *Where do I stand when it comes to the Ten Commandments? Am I breaking any of them in the letter? Am I breaking any of them in the spirit?* This should be on our mind, too, when we keep the Days of Unleavened Bread. God is training and testing us—running us through our drills, like any team that has drills and practices—because He wants to know what's in our heart. And it is just as important that we, too, know what's in our heart. Our tests help us see where we are growing and where we still need to grow much more.

And we must be honest with ourselves. Oftentimes, our heart can be self-deceiving. Take the example of being in school. We can think, *Oh yeah, I know all this material. I've been studying this. I've got it.* Then the test comes, and we think, *Whoa, I really missed that one, didn't I?* And maybe we hope the teacher will let us take the test again. We can see in our own lives that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:9–10).

By ourselves, we are not capable of doing what we need to do. We need God's help. We need Him to live in us, because we are incapable of guiding our lives on our own. God tests us so we will recognize this—both that we still need to improve and that we can have confidence that, mistakes aside, we are on the right track. God is refining us, like metals are purified when refined—making us purer.

The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us of what God is doing. The Passover reminds us that our Savior was willing to sacrifice Himself for us, even when He didn't deserve death. He was willing to humble Himself, though He didn't need to be refined or purified: “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2:22–24).

How grateful we should be that our Elder Brother was willing to lay down His life for us! And we read of the lesson we should take from that: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). We are humbled because Christ was humbled. Christ was willing to let Himself be humbled, and humbling is good for us as well.

### Feeding on Christ

What we eat eventually comes out of us, and whatever is in our heart is also going to come out—out of our mouth or in our actions. “Whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods” (Mark 7:18–19).

The world’s false Christianity often takes this statement wrongly, misunderstanding that it has to do with eating unclean foods. But notice the rest of Christ’s statement. “And He said, ‘What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man’” (Mark 7:20–23).

This is exactly what Christ—the God of the Old Testament—was teaching the Israelites when He tested them with His gift of manna. He wanted them to understand its spiritual intent. But the ancient Israelites didn’t get it, and the Jews in Jesus’ day *still* didn’t get it. We read:

Therefore they said to Him, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:30–33).

How ironic—He was the one who had given that bread to their fathers, yet they were rejecting Him just as their fathers had. And that’s the lesson for us, as well: It’s not ultimately about the physical bread we eat, but about the One who is providing it. That was the spiritual lesson. Christ told them:

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” The Jews therefore quarreled

among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” (John 6:51–56).

The intent was for Christ to live in them, and the intent is for Christ to live in us. That’s the lesson. “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me” (v. 57).

Brethren, are we feeding on Christ? It can be so easy, when we come to the end of the Days of Unleavened Bread, to think, *I’ve been keeping the Days of Unleavened Bread*—when all we have really done is go without puffy bread, and now, when we’re done eating flatbread, we eat puffy bread again. But the lesson God has for us is so much more. It’s not just *doing* what He says—it’s actually letting Him live in us.

Christ was totally without sin, as pictured by the unleavened bread we eat—totally deflated and humbled. There was no self-will or selfishness in Him at all. That’s our Savior. “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). This should put our own humbling and testing into a very different perspective.

### We Are Not Alone

In the context of the Days of Unleavened Bread, the Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian brethren of what the ancient Israelites went through. “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1–2). Remember, the Last Day of Unleavened Bread would have been the time when the ancient Israelites came through the Red Sea through God’s miraculous intervention. And Christ was with them at that time. “All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (v. 4).

Yet God was not pleased with most of the Israelites. Paul goes on to list some of the traps, some of the sins, and some of the mishaps that happened as they wandered through the wilderness. And all of those same spiritual traps are around us now. Today, as we are walking through *our* wilderness—as we are walking through a very, very dangerous world—God is still with us. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you

to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (vv. 12–13).

Yes, whatever we face, Christ is with us. He will face our trials with us—because He is in us as we are humbled, as we are tested. So, if we only focus on the *physical* during the Days of Unleavened Bread, and we’re *not* in tune with asking Christ to live in us—to change us, to teach us, to humble us in gentleness—then what will it really mean? Let’s make sure that we are responding to His presence in our lives. We must be spiritually unleavened, not just eating physical flatbread.

Whatever we face, Christ is with us. He will face our trials with us—because He is in us as we are humbled, as we are tested. So, if we only focus on the *physical* during the Days of Unleavened Bread, and we’re *not* in tune with asking Christ to live in us—to change us, to teach us, to humble us in gentleness—then what will it really mean? **Let’s make sure that we are responding to His presence in our lives. We must be spiritually unleavened, not just eating physical flatbread.**

Paul told the Corinthian brethren, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:6–8).

The Corinthians had neglected the lesson of the Days of Unleavened Bread. They were arrogant, not humbled. Though Christ’s sacrifice had allowed them to become spiritually unleavened, their behavior didn’t match. Let’s not make that mistake in our own lives!

### God’s Loving Plan for Us

I hope we can appreciate how God humbles and tests us not because He hates us, but because of just how much He *loves* us. Any parent should be able to understand. “You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you” (Deuteronomy 8:5). The same One who chastens us is the One who gave His life for those He chastens. He made that sacrifice because of His love for us, and that’s the same love that motivates Him to humble and test us today. He will never forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

In Hebrews 12:5–7, Paul wrote to brethren who had forgotten that lesson: “You have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?’”

God is working to do good in our lives. He gives us circumstances to bring about the best in the end. When we ask Him for the blessings we think are best for us—intervention in our trials, or healing from what ails us—we want them to come immediately. And, often, they do. But sometimes we must wait, even for a long, long time. God isn’t just trying to smooth the bumps in our daily lives—He is preparing us for places in His Kingdom, a whole new level of existence for us in the God Family, where we will do amazing things and enjoy amazing fellowship. We are heirs to a glorious Kingdom.

We read that God’s Holy Spirit “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we also may be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:16–18).

God has a plan for the world in general, and He also has a specific plan for your life and mine. The Days of Unleavened Bread represent our lives—times of trials, humbling, and testing, along with times of joy and blessings. And even our tests and trials are a kind of blessing.

God intervenes in our lives for our good. That’s true when He answers our prayers, and it’s true when He humbles and tests us. The longer we live, the more we should see this. He has our very best interests at heart. He helps us—even in spite of ourselves—blesses us, and takes care of us, just as He took care of the ancient Israelites: “who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end” (Deuteronomy 8:16).

So, let’s be grateful for what He is doing in our lives. Let’s be grateful for what the Days of Unleavened Bread teach us. Let’s be grateful that at the end of our race, as we enter life with God forever, we will be able to look back with perfect understanding on the times when He said, *I am working with you to humble and to test you.* (LH)



# Appreciating Christ's Sacrifice

By **Wallace G. Smith**

**M**any years ago, my family had a large plastic container that was filled with coins, but three dollars' worth of dimes were kept separate from the rest, because they were old dimes from back when the U.S. used real silver for the coins. One day, as I was holding those dimes and considering how much they might be worth, it suddenly struck me that I was literally holding *30 pieces of silver*. Though my coins were smaller than those of the first century, it was still moving to reflect on how someone once saw the life of Jesus Christ as worth not much more than what I was holding in my hand.

And then I wondered: *Do I ever make that kind of miscalculation? Do I ever undervalue the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ?*

As the Passover approaches, this is an especially appropriate topic on which to meditate. Do we appreciate the true value of Christ's sacrifice? Doing so requires an understanding of what it achieved, why it was necessary, and what it required of Him.

## **The Uncrossable Gulf**

When God created humanity, He did so for a remarkable hope—a hope that should be a profound motivation for each of us. The Apostle John wrote, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 John 3:1).

It's easy to fail to appreciate the full meaning of that scripture. Even if we have a sense that, being created in His image, we reflect Him in some way, that is not the same as grasping what it means to actually *be* God.

John continues, “Beloved, *now we are* children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (v. 2). A child in the womb is your child—but the child in the womb hasn't seen its destiny yet. It's in darkness, and it doesn't know its purpose until it's born and gets to see Mom and Dad, see—in a way—its destiny. In the same way, we will not truly see and grasp the fullness of our destiny until we

are born at the resurrection, meeting Christ in the clouds and finally fully reflecting Him in glory.

“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (v. 3). Do we comprehend that God's purpose is to make us like Him? The more that hope is woven into us, the more it will motivate us to purify ourselves. It is a vision greater than any other. God created humanity with the possibility to become like Him and enjoy the life and existence He and Jesus Christ enjoy—part of Their Family forever. It's a remarkable hope, but how do we act upon that hope? As we approach the Passover season, we should meditate on the fact that, in our own ways, we all too often neglect that hope with our own choices, repeating the mistake of Adam and Eve and saying, by our actions, *God, not Your will, but my will be done*.

The Apostle Paul wrote that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Between the place where God intends us to be and the place where our actions and choices take us, there is a gulf of unimaginable proportions. Even if we never sinned again for the rest of our lives, we would still be only broken sinners who eventually stopped. We fall so far short of the glory of God.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that there was a time when they “were *without Christ... having no hope and without God in the world*” (Ephesians 2:11–12). Without Christ, there literally is *no hope*.

But he also wrote that “now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (v. 13). Christ's sacrifice enabled a bridging of the chasm between us and God, a bridging that before had not been imaginable. Yet it is hard to completely grasp just how wide that chasm is because we don't fully understand what is on the other side—what it truly means to be God.

Christ paid the full penalty for sin, one aspect of which is separation from our Creator: “Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1–2).

Why is that? Why do our sins separate us? Because God is *holy*. He is pure, righteous, and perfect. He told ancient Is-

rael, “I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44). No one will live with God forever who *isn't* holy. The prophet Habakkuk says of God, “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness” (Habakkuk 1:13).

It is so easy to make excuses for “small sins” in our lives—justifying to ourselves that one unkind word we said in the heat of our emotions, or the one tiny falsehood we said because we felt embarrassed or trapped. Yet passages such as these reveal just how foreign *any* sin is to the character and nature of God—and how foreign sin is to everything our Father is seeking to form within us so that He can share His eternal existence with us.

Reflecting on the pure and righteous holiness of God helps us to comprehend the vast chasm between us and Him that even *one* “small sin” would create—let alone the enormous constellation of sins that most all of us accumulate over the course of our lives. That sin puts *all* of us on the opposite side of a great chasm from God, because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

That gulf cannot be bridged by our actions. It requires Christ's sacrifice. But when we understand the immensity of that gulf, we begin to appreciate just what it meant for Christ to *be* sacrificed. Christ's sacrifice makes it possible to bridge that gap so God can work in our lives, so He can have His fingers knuckle-deep into our character, our personality, and help us make the changes He wants us to make. As Passover draws near, we should meditate on how He built a bridge for us across an otherwise uncrossable gulf—through His sacrifice.

### **The Magnitude of the Act**

We can think of a miracle as an instance when the *laws* of nature are suspended, overruled, or superseded by the *God* of nature. A miracle is something that could not happen without an act of God, because it does not make sense according to natural law—it points to something beyond the natural. And the Bible contains a plethora of astonishing miracles.

One miracle would be the creation itself—that God created everything! That was a supernatural act! Not a single law of nature can explain creation without a Creator. And consider the parting of the Red Sea—imagine what it would be like to be an Israelite wandering across its bed with walls of water on both sides of you! Would you have dared to touch one of these walls of water? As there were little boys among the people of Israel, I suspect the walls were touched.

We can enjoy imagining what it was like to experience that miracle. But there is an even greater miracle, and it's rooted in the very identity of God Himself. If you've attended services with the Living Church of God for very long, you've noticed that many ministers say “the Eternal” when

they're reading the Bible and come to the capitalized “LORD” in the Old Testament—which is how most Bibles indicate the YHVH that represents God's name. We don't substitute “LORD” with “Eternal” on the *Tomorrow's World* telecast or in our magazines, because that would confuse people, but among brethren we tend to say, “the Eternal,” because that is one way to communicate the meaning of God's name, a meaning that describes both the One who became God the Father and the One who became Jesus Christ.

Before He was the Son of God, the Word—the *Logos*—interacted with Moses. When Moses asked what His name was, He said, “I AM WHO I AM.” His existence defines what existence is. He is the Ever-Living One, whose life *defines what living is*. All of our lives, even put together, are barely a breath compared to the reality of what life is for God. God so represents existence and life that He can truthfully say, *My name is I AM*. We are all temporary. Only God is truly permanent.

Perhaps, then, the greatest miracle in the Bible is that this Being—the Eternal, the Ever-Living One—*died*. If a miracle is the suspension of what is natural, has there ever been a more unnatural circumstance in all of human history?

We read that, as Christ was hanging on the stake, “from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land” (Matthew 27:45)—that is, from noon to about 3:00 pm. It's *not natural* for darkness to be all over the land for three hours during the brightest time of the day. “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (v. 46). Jesus was forsaken by God—and it was completely unnatural that the Two who define what it is to be God, the God Family, would be separated.

“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit” (v. 50). We know from John 19:34 that, at that time, a spear was rammed into His side and He was murdered.

Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:51–54).

Even the Gentiles, to whom Jesus had not preached, saw how nature itself responded to the death of this Man, and they gave testimony that “this was the Son of God!” It was as if nature itself convulsed at what it was forced to endure—the most unnatural act it had ever witnessed—the death of its own Creator.

The *Ever-Living* One had to *die* so that our sins could be forgiven. What a momentous occurrence in the history of creation. And what a perspective it should give us concerning the price required to remove our sins.

### The Choice to Be Human

A third reason to appreciate Christ's sacrifice is that He chose to make it of His own free will. Just as we have the power to choose in our own lives, so did He. Everything Jesus did, He did voluntarily.

In Philippians 2, we are admonished by the Apostle Paul to be of the same mind as Christ (v. 5). But more than that, he highlights just what aspect of Christ's mind he is thinking of. The *English Standard Version* renders it more clearly than the *New King James*, saying that Jesus, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (vv. 6–7). That is, as the Word who was "with God" and "was God" (John 1:1), He did not count that as something to which He needed to desperately cling. Rather, He was willing to give it up—to "empty Himself" of His divine privileges and glory and become mere flesh and blood, like you and I are, vulnerable to pain, suffering, and death.

And what was His approach in this life—as a human just like us? We read of His comment to His Father in the Garden

If you ever wonder whether you're at the limits of God's mercy, imagine how far the heavens are from the earth—and given the heavens include the realm of the planets and stars, that distance is unfathomable. If we doubt the ability or willingness of God to forgive us, we don't fully comprehend Jesus Christ's sacrifice. It's not that your old sins are simply distant from you; they're not on your life's radar screen anymore. **The price paid for you was the life of your Creator—if that price has been paid to free someone from sin, then he is free indeed.**

of Gethsemane, before His arrest: "Not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Yet this was not a one-time decision at the *end* of His life. It was a characteristic of His *entire* life, every moment of every day, for thirty-three-and-a-half years.

Because of that lifetime of choices, "we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.... 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. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14–16).

Of course, this doesn't mean that Jesus was tempted in all the particular *details* of every possible variety of human sin throughout time. For instance, He didn't have to be tempted to use ChatGPT to cheat on His homework to fully feel the temptation to lie. He didn't have to be tempted to look at Internet pornography to fully feel the temptation to lust. The point is that, throughout His human life, He was tempted to break every one of the Ten Commandments, like we are. But because He made the continual choice to tell God, "Not My will, but Yours," we can have confidence that no matter the sin we bring before Him, He can say, *I know what it feels like to be tempted by such sins—and I can help.*

Knowing this, we see that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was far more than just His final torture and execution. He sacrificed *continually* for more than three decades. He emptied Himself of His divine privileges so He could live like we do, so we could have confidence in what He has done—and in what He *can* do in us.

### The Choice to Die

And we must remember that Christ was not *obligated* to sacrifice Himself. He made that choice willingly—He was not forced against His will. We read, "As the Father knows Me,

even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep" (John 10:15). He actively *chose* to lay down His life as He did.

When the authorities were coming to arrest Christ and Peter tried to physically defend Him, "Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?'" (Matthew 26:52–53).

The number of soldiers in a legion has varied, but a Roman legion in the first century had about 5,000 troops. If at *any* point Jesus had decided that mankind wasn't worth it, more than 60,000 angels would have appeared in the sky to intervene. I imagine Jerusalem would have become a crater.

But Jesus never chose to do that. He actively chose, moment by moment, to embrace everything He was enduring—including penalties that would have been ours. We have earned death (Romans 6:23), so Jesus Christ experi-

enced death. He paid that penalty, as well as the penalty of physical suffering—which our sins cause not just for us, but for others as well. So, Jesus Christ allowed His body, which deserved no punishment whatsoever, to be ravaged until even His very muscles and bones were exposed. As lash after lash *after lash after lash* came, there was surely a point when 60,000 angels would have been a tempting option. Yet, with each strike, Christ simply waited for the next. He chose to allow that.

Ultimately, He allowed Himself to experience even separation from God, as noted earlier: “At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which is translated, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Mark 15:34). There on the stake, He quoted from Psalm 22, repeating words He had inspired many centuries before, knowing in advance what He would suffer. (For more on this, read this issue’s Editorial, “The Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd,” by Mr. Gerald Weston.)

One of the greatest lessons of Christ’s sacrifice is that He endured separation from the Father so that we will never have to. The assurance that God will never abandon us is grounded in Jesus Christ’s sacrifice, as He paid that penalty. Despite all our imperfections, we will never have to know a separation from God—because of the price Jesus Christ voluntarily paid on that Passover.

### Forgiven and Changed

And, of course, one of the greatest blessings that results from Jesus Christ’s sacrifice is utter and complete forgiveness of the sins we have committed. His ancestor David wrote, “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Psalm 103:1–5). Take the time to think about those words this season. The King of all there is, the Ruler of all existence, has forgiven your sins, saving from destruction and, further, crowning you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.

He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust (vv. 10–14).

If you ever wonder whether you’re at the limits of God’s mercy, imagine how far the heavens are from the earth—and given the heavens include the realm of the planets and stars, that distance is unfathomable. If we doubt the ability or willingness of God to forgive us, it means that we don’t fully comprehend the fullness of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. It’s not that your old sins are simply distant from you; they’re not on your life’s radar screen anymore. The price paid for you was the life of your Creator—the greatest price that could *possibly* be paid. If *that* price has been paid to free someone from sin, then he is *free indeed*.

To be sure, there is such a thing as the unpardonable sin, but if you’re capable of repenting—truly feeling sorrow, seeking to change your life and turn toward God—you have not committed that sin, since those who commit that sin simply will *not* choose to repent (Hebrews 6:4–6). There is no sin so terrible that, should we choose to drop to our knees before God and say, *I do not want this anymore, I want You and the life You hold out to me*, somehow God won’t find His Son’s sacrifice sufficient for that. It *is* sufficient, so we have access to forgiveness.

Christ Himself revealed the willingness of His Father to forgive: “Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven’” (Matthew 18:21–22). This was not permission to withhold forgiveness when “sin #491” is reached. This was Christ’s way of saying, *You should be an endless well of forgiveness, because that’s what My Father and I are*. Does God expect more of us than He is willing to do, Himself? Do we ever think He has run out of forgiveness toward us? *He has not*.

Through His gift of the Holy Spirit, we have access to *God’s divine nature*. We read that “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be *partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:3–4). There is *nothing* God is holding back from us. The price that was willingly paid gives you access to *everything*.

Christ’s sacrifice opens a door. God is able, at baptism, with Jesus’ life given on our behalf, to take some of His very own nature and place it within us. No vessel of man’s devising is pure enough to contain any portion of the divine nature—yet that sacrifice made on our behalf has made us among the most precious vessels in existence, such that God can say, *I will put My nature there*.

We are told that “we love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). There’s a reason the very first Festival *must* be Passover—without it, the rest can’t happen. May all of us, this Passover season, grow to appreciate even more fully the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. (LW)



# How to Pray When You Are Discouraged

By **J. Charles Ogwyn**

**D**o you find it difficult to pray when you are discouraged or depressed? It is ironic that sometimes when we need God's help the most, we may have our greatest difficulty in reaching out to Him for the help that we so desperately need. Why is this?

It is because we doubt. We may doubt whether God is hearing our prayers. We may doubt that our prayers make a difference. We may even doubt that God really wants to help us. Just when we need God's help the most, we may doubt that His help is available.

During these times of doubt, we may find it difficult to pray, if we can even bring ourselves to pray at all. We have trouble knowing what to say, putting our thoughts into words, focusing on our prayers, and blocking out distractions. These troubles can discourage us further—and can feed any doubts we may have.

How can a Christian escape this spiritually self-destructive approach? How should we pray when we are discouraged—when we feel all alone, when we feel as though things cannot possibly grow any worse? How can we pray when we cannot see the “light at the end of the tunnel”?

## **Start With What You Know**

It is important to go back, start with what we know, and then work forward from there. Starting with what we know will establish our focus in the right place. So, what do we know that we can use as our starting point? We know that God exists. We know that the Bible is His word. We know that His word is faithful and cannot fail. The proof of these truths is all around—in His creation, in His prophecies that have been fulfilled, and in the many mighty miracles He has performed. Starting from what we know, we can then move forward using His word as our guide. Whatever our discouragement, God's word holds the key to helping us move forward.

Sometimes we feel unable to reach out to God in prayer because of overwhelming feelings of guilt. But where did we get the idea that we have done something so terrible that God cannot forgive us? Does this discouraging idea come from God's word? Certainly not! The idea that God cannot forgive

us—that we cannot accept His forgiveness and move on from our mistakes—comes directly from Satan!

We are told that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). No amount of righteousness or good works will ever atone for the mistakes we have made. We must accept the reality that there is nothing anyone can ever do to “earn” salvation. We also read that “the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

We have all fallen short, and the penalty is death. Only through Christ's sacrifice do we have hope. This stands in stark contrast to the Satan-inspired idea that there are different classifications of sin. Call them mortal sins and venial sins, or call them greater sins and lesser sins, but the idea that some sins are grievous, while others do not really matter, is not rooted in God's word! The Bible tells us that, as far as God is concerned, *all* have earned the death penalty through sin—but that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. His shed blood pays the penalty for our sins, as long as we continue to repent and keep striving to overcome.

Have you stumbled so many times that you are embarrassed to ask God for forgiveness? You may think, *If I were God, I would have given up on me a long time ago*. We can all be thankful that our Father in Heaven is more merciful and forgiving than anyone we have ever known. Consider the example of the Apostle Paul. Before he was called, he was involved in the murder of Christians, persecuting and trying to destroy God's Church. Consider the enormous guilt that he must have felt after God called him, when he realized that he had been doing Satan's work (Acts 9:1–5). Yet, because Paul deeply repented, God not only forgave him, but went on to use him in a remarkable way!

No matter what we have done, and no matter how many times we have stumbled, all we have to do is repent—turn from sin—and move forward with God's help, striving to build His character in our lives and accepting that Christ's shed blood has washed away our sins.

## **Expect Trials**

Perhaps we are going through such difficult trials that we feel we have no hope. It may seem as though our trials are overwhelming us and that they will never end. What does God's

word say? The Apostle Peter wrote, “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you” (1 Peter 4:12). We should not be shocked when we face grievous trials—we should expect them!

Why should we expect such difficult trials? Hebrews 2:10 reminds us that our Savior was perfected through suffering. There is no shortcut; we cannot grow if we never suffer. Thankfully, we need not endure our trials alone and without help. No matter how difficult our trials may become—even if we feel abandoned by those around us—God promises, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you. So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper’” (Hebrews 13:5–6).

God wants to perfect us, not overwhelm us. Christ was sent not to condemn us, but to save us (John 3:17). God is on our side; He is not “out to get us.” He does not want to see us stumble or fail. He is arranging our circumstances so we can build His character in our lives and eventually share in His glory as part of His Family for all eternity. Why is He doing this? Because He is love (1 John 4:8).

We must always remember that our loving Father in Heaven takes great pleasure in hearing our prayers. He enjoys the time we spend with Him in prayer, in much the same way that loving parents or grandparents delight in spending time with their children or grandchildren. Since God already

God is on our side; He is not “out to get us.” He does not want to see us stumble or fail. He is arranging our circumstances so we can build His character in our lives and eventually share in His glory as part of His Family for all eternity. **Why is He doing this? Because He is love.**

knows what we need, even before we ask (Matthew 6:32), why does He want us to ask for it? Why does Scripture instruct us, “let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6)?

It should be clear that praying to God is for our benefit, not His. Prayer is a vital exercise. It forces us to focus on Him—the One who has power without limits, who is bigger than our problems. When we focus on God, this helps us gain the proper perspective on our trials. When we talk with our Father about what is on our mind, we can speak freely—even bluntly. We need not be ashamed, because God already knows our thoughts *before* we express them to Him in words.

As we talk through our problems, we should tell God how we feel. If we know that our attitudes or our feelings are wrong, we should tell Him. We can explain to Him why we

feel the way we do, and we can ask Him to help us overcome those feelings.

This act of talking freely to God moves our focus away from the physical and puts it on the spiritual—on our Father in Heaven, who loves us and gave His Son for us (John 3:16). It puts our focus on His word and on the principles it contains. As we focus on God, it will become easier for Him to work with us—to mold and shape us, to guide and direct us.

### **Be Thankful**

Philippians 4:6 reminds us that as we make our requests known to God, we should do so “with thanksgiving.” This approach also helps us put our problems in the proper perspective. No matter how much we need, we can be thankful for the many blessings that far outnumber our needs.

We should also remember that there is often a difference between what we think we need and what we really need. Sometimes we confuse our wishes and desires with our needs. As we tell God what we need or what we desire, it is fitting that we always do so in the context of being thankful for what He has already done for us—and for what He promises He will do for us in the future.

As we spend time earnestly pouring out our heart to God, our focus shifts away from preoccupation with the physical realm and our own problems. As we focus on what He is doing and on what He will do, we begin to focus on His plan for us, and He will respond by helping to guide not only our steps, but also our thoughts. As we focus on His role as our helper—the One who will never forsake us—we will more deeply realize that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

We can take great comfort from these words: “All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). When our lives seem difficult—when it seems that God’s answers to our prayers are not what we had hoped—we can meditate prayerfully on this scripture. In doing so, we can begin to grasp the “bigger picture,” gain a proper perspective on our problems, and realize that God’s plan is much larger than we are—that He can bring good out of even the most painful experiences.

However, for that good to come about in our lives, we must continue to focus on God. We must not allow ourselves to become distracted by self-pity. We must not allow ourselves to be led astray by Satan’s wiles. Rather, we must continue to focus on the One whom we thank for making us a part of His grand and masterful plan. When we feel discouraged, we can find hope in the Apostle Paul’s words: “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). <sup>(LW)</sup>



# Unleavened Recipes for Your Sincere, Truthful Enjoyment

One of the joys of the Days of Unleavened Bread is preparing treats that we rarely make during the rest of the year. To aid your joy, we are publishing a collection of recipes in this year's *Living Church News*. Ladies of Living Education-Charlotte teamed up with wives here at Headquarters to bake each of these delicious dishes, and we hope you will find something enjoyable to try!

Of course, there is no mandate to bake your own bread, and you can also find appropriate unleavened bread items at many grocery stores. With careful reading of labels, you can have suitable unleavened bread to remind you of lessons of these important days. However, when feasible, preparing recipes ourselves highlights and enhances the pleasure and happiness of God's ways, and usually adds the additional benefits of sharing with and serving others. We look forward to many readers also adapting these recipes to fit their needs.

As we are physical creatures, God often commands us to do physical things to help us learn spiritual lessons. Mindful and purposeful actions enrich our thoughts and lives as we prepare for and observe His Festivals throughout the year. And, in this spring Festival season, we also experience the benefit of eating the results!

We hope that this year's Days of Unleavened Bread season will be most enlightening, encouraging, and enjoyable for all our readers! And may the food we enjoy during these days remind us to partake of the most important unleavened bread as we observe the Festivals that God has designed for our good: "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8).

—Editorial Staff

## Breads

### Bread for Passover Service

Several Passover bread recipes have been circulated in the Church over the years. This recipe is based on Mrs. Isabell Hoeh's, published by the Radio Church of God and Ambassador College in 1960, and should be a suitable model for any home-made Passover bread.

2 cups whole wheat flour  
 ¾ teaspoon salt  
 1½ tablespoons butter  
 1 tablespoon olive or vegetable oil  
 ½ cup water

Preheat oven to 400°F. Mix together flour and salt. Cut in butter with two knives or a pastry blender. Combine oil and water and mix well, then pour over flour mixture and mix lightly with a fork. If more water is needed, add no more than a tablespoon at a time, just enough for dough to form a ball. When dough forms a ball, knead on floured board until dough is smooth. Working with one ¼-cup to ⅓-cup portion at a time, roll out on floured board until thin. Place on ungreased cookie sheet and trim edges neatly before baking. Bake for 7–10 minutes until lightly browned.



### Cottage Cheese Bread

2½ cups flour  
 1 cup butter  
 1 teaspoon salt  
 2 cups cottage cheese  
*Optional ½ cup shredded sharp cheddar*

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix all ingredients. Spoon about ¼ cup of batter at a time onto a greased or parchment-lined cookie sheet. Bake for 30 minutes. Serve warm or cooled. Refrigerate leftovers.

### Cottage Cheese Crescent Rolls

½ cup butter  
 2 cups flour

2 cups cottage cheese  
 ½ teaspoon salt  
 Toppings of your choice

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix all ingredients well. Refrigerate eight hours or overnight. Divide dough into four pieces. Roll each piece into a circle and sprinkle desired toppings along outer edge. Cut into four, six, or eight wedges, and from wide end, roll up to form crescents. Bake for 30 minutes.

Toppings can include nuts, garlic powder, dried minced onions, salt, cheddar cheese, or even everything-bagel seasoning—or, for a dessert option, cinnamon, sugar, or chocolate chips.

*Note:* To speed things along without an overnight refrigeration, grate frozen butter into mixture, then set dough into freezer for about an hour.



### Golden Delight Pancakes

1 cup ricotta cheese or cream-style cottage cheese  
 6 eggs  
 Heaping ½ cup whole-wheat flour  
 ¼ tsp salt  
 ¼ tsp oil  
 ¼ cup milk  
 ½ tsp vanilla

Place all ingredients in a blender. Cover and blend at high speed for one minute. Pour ¼-cup portions of batter on a greased griddle and, when browned underneath, flip to cook other side. Makes 20 four-inch pancakes. These can also be cooked as waffles. Bake extra and freeze—reheat in a toaster and they are as delicious as freshly made.

### Honey Bread

2 cups flour  
 ¼ cup brown sugar  
 ¾ cup melted butter  
 ¼ cup water  
 2 tablespoons honey

Preheat oven to 350°F and mix ingredients together. On lightly floured surface, roll out dough to half-inch thickness. Place dough on a greased cookie sheet and bake for 17 minutes. Let cool and slice as desired.

### Jewish Almond Bread

4 eggs  
1 cup sugar  
3 cups flour  
1 cup butter  
½ cup sliced almonds  
½ teaspoon vanilla  
2 teaspoons almond extract

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix eggs, sugar, and one cup flour. Add butter, mix well. Add two cups flour, almonds, vanilla, and almond extract. Pour into greased pans—small loaves work well. Bake for 30 minutes.

### Soft Matzo

2½ cups flour (plus more for dusting)  
4 tablespoons olive oil  
½ teaspoon salt  
1 cup water

Combine all ingredients and form a soft ball of dough, then roll into a 15x8-inch oval and place on a floured 18-inch piece of parchment paper. To make serving easier, lightly score top by running knife through it in a diamond-shaped pattern, being careful not to cut completely through dough. Transfer paper with dough onto baking sheet, then transfer all to bottom rack of oven. Broil at high for ten minutes—flipping after five minutes—or until bread is golden brown and spotted.

## Desserts

### Almond and Coconut Cake

1 ½ cups almond flour  
½ grated coconut  
¼ teaspoon salt  
1 ¼ cups sugar  
4 eggs  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
⅔ cup melted and cooled butter  
2 tablespoons almond flakes  
Powdered sugar for garnish



Preheat oven to 350°F. Butter and flour a nine-inch spring-form pan lined with parchment or baking paper. In bowl add almond flour, coconut, salt, and sugar, whisking well to combine. In another bowl whisk together eggs and vanilla. Add cooled butter to eggs and whisk well. Pour wet ingredients into dry ingredients and mix well. Pour into a prepared pan and spread out evenly. Scatter sliced almonds on top. Bake in oven for 40 minutes or until top springs back slowly when gently pressed. Cool cake in pan on wire rack. Once completely cooled, remove. Sprinkle with powdered sugar.

Best served warm but freezes well—thaw or warm in microwave before serving. Stays fresh in fridge for a week—bring to room temperature or warm in a microwave before serving. Sliced pistachios can be used instead of almonds.



### Chocolate Marshmallow Delight

¾ cup butter  
¼ cup cocoa powder, sifted  
2 cups sugar  
4 eggs  
1½ cups flour  
2 teaspoons vanilla  
Pinch of salt  
*Optional 1 cup chopped nuts*

*Topping:*

½ cup butter  
¼ cup cocoa powder, sifted

1/2 cup evaporated milk  
 About 4 cups powdered sugar, sifted  
 1 teaspoon vanilla  
 1 1/2 bags marshmallows

Preheat oven to 350°F. Melt butter and whisk in cocoa powder until smooth. Beat eggs and sugar together and pour into cocoa-butter mixture. Add flour and salt. Mix well. Add vanilla (and nuts if desired). Bake in a greased, floured 9x13-inch pan for 30 minutes. To make frosting, heat milk, butter, and cocoa powder together on stove until smooth. Mix in other ingredients over heat until smooth. Have frosting ready when taking pan from oven so topping will adhere to cake properly. Remove pan from oven and cover immediately with a single layer of marshmallows. Then, pour hot frosting evenly over top. Let cool until topping is completely hardened before cutting.



### Gluten-Free Fudge Brownies

1/2 cup melted butter  
 1 cup semisweet or dark chocolate chips  
 1/2 cup granulated sugar  
 3 large eggs  
 1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder  
*Optional 1/4 teaspoon salt*  
*Optional 1/2 teaspoon vanilla*

Preheat oven to 350°F. Lightly grease an 8x8-inch baking dish or pan with non-stick cooking spray and set aside. In a medium saucepan on a stovetop, melt butter and chocolate chips over low heat, stirring every 30 seconds until chocolate chips are melted and smooth. Whisk in sugar. Remove from heat and let cool a bit, then add eggs one at a time until batter is smooth. Add cocoa powder—plus salt and vanilla, if desired—and stir until well incorporated. Spread batter evenly into prepared baking dish. Bake at 350°F for 25–30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Let cool completely in pan at least an hour after bringing out of oven before cutting—otherwise they will fall apart.



### Gluten-Free Hazelnut Croissant Rolls

2 cups gluten-free flour  
 1/4 teaspoon salt  
 2/3 cup cold butter  
 1 egg yolk  
 3/4 cup sour cream  
 Nutella  
 1 cup powdered sugar, sifted  
 1 tablespoon hot water  
 1/2 teaspoon almond extract

Preheat oven to 375°F. Measure flour and salt into large bowl. Cut in butter and combine well. Stir in egg yolk and sour cream and mix well. Shape into three balls. Wrap in wax paper and chill for at least one hour. Then, on lightly floured surface, roll each ball into six-inch circle. Spread Nutella over entirety of each circle. Using a pizza cutter, cut dough into 8 or 16 equal wedges. Roll each wedge, starting at wide end. Place on greased cookie sheet with point-side down. Repeat for other two dough balls. Bake for 20 minutes or until lightly browned. Cool on racks. Whisk together powdered sugar, water, and almond extract to make simple icing. Drizzle lightly over cold butter horns, just to glaze, placing wax paper under racks to catch excess icing drips.



### Gluten-Free Jam Cookies

1/2 cup melted butter  
 1/8 teaspoon salt  
 1/4 cup powdered sugar, sifted

1 teaspoon vanilla  
 1¼ cups gluten-free flour  
 ¼ teaspoon xanthan gum  
 Your preferred jam, jelly, curd, etc.

*Glaze:*

4 teaspoons lemon juice or lime juice  
 ¾ cup powdered sugar, sifted (if you find it needs to be thinner, you can add a very small amount of milk)

Preheat oven to 350°F. Melt butter. Mix powdered sugar, salt, xanthan gum, and flour, and pour in melted butter and vanilla. Mix well to combine all ingredients. Divide dough into three portions, then hand-roll into nine-inch ropes or lengths to fit on your cookie sheet. Place them on a lightly greased cookie sheet. Make shallow depression down center of each rope with your index finger, then fill each depression with jam. Don't make depression area too deep, or cookies will break. Bake for 20–25 minutes—cookies should be only slightly browned on edges. Cool completely. Prepare glaze and drizzle over jam in crisscross pattern. Once glaze has set, cut ropes into one-inch cookies.



**Shortbread Bars**

1 cup butter  
 1 cup brown sugar  
 2 cups white flour  
 1 egg yolk  
 1 teaspoon vanilla  
 1½ cups your choice of chocolate chips, butterscotch chips, or peanut butter chips

*Optional pecans*

Preheat oven to 325°F. Mix first five ingredients together and spread dough on parchment-paper-lined cookie sheet. Bake for 15 minutes. When finished baking, immediately pour chocolate, butterscotch, or peanut butter chips on hot dough. Spread melted chips evenly, then top with pecans. Let cool completely, then cut into bars.

**Swiss Horns**

2 cups all-purpose flour  
 ¼ teaspoon salt  
 ½ cup plus ⅓ cup cold butter  
 Yolk of 1 large egg, lightly beaten  
 ¾ cup sour cream  
 ½ cup chopped pecans  
 ½ cup sugar  
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

*Optional glaze:*

1 cup powdered sugar, sifted  
 2 tablespoons milk  
 ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 350°F. Pour flour and salt into large bowl, then cut in butter until mix is crumbly. Stir in sour cream and egg yolk, then shape mix into ball. Chill overnight or for at least three hours. After chilling, divide dough into three portions, then roll each portion into twelve-inch circle on well-floured surface. Combine pecans, sugar, and cinnamon to make filling, then sprinkle a third of filling over each circle of dough. Cut each circle of dough into twelve wedges, then roll each wedge, starting at wide end. Place rolled wedges onto greased baking sheets, point-side down. Bake for 15–18 minutes or until lightly browned. If using glaze, combine glaze ingredients, then spread on warm rolls. (LN)



## Births

Mr. and Mrs. Jake and Julia Boyer of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation are happy to share the news of the birth of their daughter **Joséphine Carmen Lisa Boyer**, who was born on November 29 weighing eight pounds, seven ounces, and measuring 21 inches long. The family are all doing well, and Emmeline and Mario are so excited to get to know their new little sister! The Boyer family thanks God for this beautiful blessing.

Mr. and Mrs. Darren and Katelyn Brinson of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation are happy to announce the birth of their third son, **Asher Matthew Brinson**, who was born on December 17. He weighed eight pounds, six ounces, and measured 20.5 inches long. Both mom and baby are doing well, and his two brothers were also happy to meet him and are enjoying their time together.

Mr. and Mrs. Ryan and Brandie Dawson are delighted to announce the birth of their third daughter, **Shiloh Brynn Dawson**, who was born on December 10. Shiloh's two sisters, Finley and Haddie, are also thrilled to shower their new little sister with love.

Mr. and Mrs. Alex and Rachael Heykoop of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation are pleased to announce the birth of **Benjamin Edward Heykoop**. He was born November 17, weighing eight pounds, eleven ounces. Mommy and baby are both doing well, and Benjamin's brothers have enjoyed welcoming him.

Mr. and Mrs. Brent and Emily Myers are happy to announce the birth of their daughter **Ariana Faith Myers**. She was born on December 11 and joins a family of sisters. The Myers attend the Zionsville, Indiana, congregation.

---

## Weddings & Anniversaries

Congratulations to **Mr. and Mrs. Ted and Deb Carper**, whose **50th wedding anniversary** was on November 16. Mr. and Mrs. Carper serve as deacon and deaconess in the Omaha, Nebraska, congregation, which honored them with cake, flowers, and a gift after Sabbath services on November 15. The brethren greatly appreciate their outstanding examples of fidelity and devotion to God, His Work, and His people.

**Mr. and Mrs. Brian and Sue Ann Pomicter**, along with brethren in the Omaha, Nebraska, congregation, celebrated their **50th wedding anniversary** on the Sabbath of December 20 after services with cake and pictures. Mr. and Mrs. Pomicter were married on a Sabbath after services, and both of their two sons—three years apart—were born on the Sabbath.

---

## Ordinations

**Mr. Jonathan Fike, Mr. and Mrs. Jed and Yvonne Sauvola, and Mr. Timothy Spencer** were ordained deacons and deaconess on September 23 by Pastors Ron Poole and Mike DeSimone and by Elder Steve Climer. Mr. Fike, Mr. and Mrs. Sauvola, and Mr. Spencer all serve in the Gaffney, South Carolina, congregation.

**Mr. Alvin Vanhoozer** was ordained an elder on November 29 by Pastor Lenny Bower. Mr. Vanhoozer serves in the Wytheville, Virginia, congregation.

## In Loving Memory

**Mr. James Bennett, 79**, a longtime member in North Wales, United Kingdom, died peacefully on Friday evening, November 28, after battling several health conditions. Mr. Bennett was a solid and steadfast member of God's Church for more than 47 years, baptized on September 1, 1978. He was ordained a deacon in 2007, and he and his wife served congregations in the Midlands of England. Mr. Bennett also served for many years on the Board of Directors for the Living Church of God UK Charity. His dedication, determination, love, and service for and to God's people, as well as his constant desire to personally grow and overcome, leave a powerful example for all of us to follow. Mr. Bennett is survived by his wife, Susan; his sons, Dan and Rob (wife Sian); and his daughters, Debbie and Catherine (husband Kamal). The Bennetts have also been blessed with four grandchildren.

**Mrs. Colleen Lemmonds, 90**, died on August 20, and the Little Rock, Arkansas, congregation will miss a beloved member. Mrs. Lemmonds was born on February 2, 1935, and was baptized into the Body of Christ on August 28, 1968. She was the last of the "Leen sisters"—Kathleen, Shirleen, and Colleen—who were all known for their faithfulness, love of the Church, and good humor. She and her late husband, Hubert, enjoyed operating a restaurant for many years. She fondly remembered going dancing with her husband when they were young. Later in life, she managed housing for the Area Agency on Aging in her community. Despite declining health, and the infirmities of age, Ms. Lemmonds loved attending Church services, always bringing a smile and kind words. On September 7, Pastor Phil West officiated her memorial service after Sabbath services. She is survived by her son Timothy, her daughter Renita Price, and two grandchildren.

**Mr. John Mackney, 74**, died on September 4. He was baptized in 2015 and very much enjoyed being at services and the weekly fellowship with brethren afterward. Mr. Mackney lived with his son and family who cared for him. He will be missed by his fellow members in the Grand Prairie, Alberta, congregation in Canada.

**Mr. Daniel Stubenvoll, 62**, died on June 13 after a series of heart attacks. He was baptized in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada, in 2023. Mr. Stubenvoll lived his entire life in the Ponoka, Alberta, area. He worked at a local lumberyard and enjoyed tending to his 80 beehives and selling the honey. Mr. Stubenvoll is survived by his wife of 18 years, Shauna, and by their daughter, Jessica. His memorial was held on September 14 at the Ponoka cemetery in a private family ceremony conducted by Elders Lenard Hine and Lawrence Hartshorne. Mr. Stubenvoll was a faithful and vibrant member of the Red Deer congregation, and he will be dearly missed.

**Mr. Norman Suba** of Othoro, Kenya, died suddenly on December 1 at **80** years of age. Mr. Suba came into the knowledge of God's truth in the early 1990s, was baptized in 1995, and was ordained a deacon in 2003. Mr. Suba farmed, providing produce for the Nairobi market and taking a keen interest in local development. Blessed with nine children—two daughters and seven sons—he also cared for the seven children of his deceased brother as part of his own family. Mr. Suba was a keen worker and dedicated to God's calling.

**Mr. William "Bill" Terrell IV, 92**, of Beaver Dam, Virginia, died February 25, 2025. He and his late wife, Peggy, to whom he was married 58 years, had five children and were longtime faithful members of the Body of Christ. Mr. Terrell served actively as a deacon until his death. No matter how he felt physically, he maintained a joyful sense of humor and a kind personality, and he remained faithful in Sabbath attendance, where his focus was always on serving and uplifting others. He generously gave to the local congregations in many ways, and he was a great example of dedication and brotherly love, traveling miles to help others when he was able. He will be greatly missed by the Virginia brethren and many others around the world.

## Electronic Service Requested

# The Danger of Complacency

It is easy to be complacent when we are comfortable and safe. In *The Lord of the Rings*, author J.R.R. Tolkien's fictional hobbits are depicted as living complacent lives before suddenly finding themselves in dangerous circumstances, and actor Elijah Wood—who starred in film adaptations of Tolkien's books—commented that complacency is “never a good place to be working from.” Are *you* complacent?

A complacent person feels self-satisfied—refusing to believe that things aren't perfect just as they are. Such a person may be unconcerned and unaware of anything being deficient or potentially dangerous—and complacency may lead to serious consequences. One example of this can occur in a workplace where employees become complacent about following established safety protocols. They may become lackadaisical in following procedures and fail to remember the potential risks of serious accidents.

Similarly, Christians may become complacent in their spiritual lives. They may become self-satisfied, having a lackadaisical approach and being unconcerned about deficiencies in obedience that lead to a dangerous spiritual condition. The Bible warns us about complacency and encourages Jesus Christ's followers to be diligent—not lazy, but faithful, obedient doers and not just hearers. Scripture warns that “the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them” (Proverbs 1:32).

The prophet Amos warned the Israelites of their false sense of security when they were in a state of moral decay. “Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near... who drink wine from bowls, and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved

for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, and those who recline at banquets shall be removed” (Amos 6:1–7). Likewise, the prophet Isaiah warned the nation of Judah about complacency: “Rise up, you women who are at ease, hear my voice; you complacent daughters, give ear to my speech” (Isaiah 32:9).

How should Christians guard against complacency? We can remind ourselves of some basic principles needed for remaining a strong Christian: We must practice daily prayer, Bible study, and meditation, along with periodic fasting, to stay close to God. As with workplace safety, we must not become too comfortable or lackadaisical in following “protocols,” nor skip any essential “safety steps,” nor fail to remember potential dangers. The Apostle Paul wrote that Christians are to “continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2), and the Apostle Peter reminds us of the need to “be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Ancient Israel was told repeatedly to be diligent in heeding the voice of the Lord—to do what was right by keeping His commandments (e.g., Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 4:9, 6:17). History shows that Israel and Judah were “off and on”—and usually “off”—not remaining diligent but repeatedly slipping into complacency.

Through Paul's inspired words, God beseeches all of us to guard against becoming complacent (Romans 12:1–11)—not to lag in diligence but to be fervent in spirit. If we do, we will avoid the danger of complacency.

—Roger Meyer