

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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A Quarter of a Millennium!

Dear Brethren,

The United States of America celebrates its 250th anniversary this July 4, as you probably know. It is such a milestone that celebrations of various sorts have already taken place and will continue taking place throughout the year, past that single calendar day.

As I have explained elsewhere, I possess tri-citizenship as an American, a Canadian, and a begotten son of the Kingdom of God. It is only the latter one that matters in the end—we are all spiritual descendants of Abraham if Christ is living in us. Nevertheless, I am very thankful to have been born in the U.S., and I also cherish my citizenship in Canada, where I have so many friends and fond memories from living there the better part of 14 years. And England, where I have twice lived, has a special spot in my heart as well.

Sadly, a younger generation in these countries and in others descending from Joseph has lost an understanding of its histories—both recent and ancient. As Americans, we take pride in our Constitution. As Canadians, we applaud our Charter of Rights, just as the British hold up the Magna Carta. But none of these documents can compare to God's covenant with Israel—both physical Israel and spiritual Israel.

Humanly devised documents may sound wise, but they are exactly that—humanly devised—and man's wisdom falls shamefully short of God's. We read in 1 Corinthians 1:19–20 (see also Isaiah 55:8) that “it is written: *‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’* Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”

How often, even amongst ourselves, we hear flawed concepts roll off our tongues as though they were sacred rights

from God: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of expression. It occasionally becomes obvious, even among Church members, that democracy has strongly influenced someone's worldview. While democratic government may temper extreme views and protect us from certain forms of abuse, it brings problems of its own, and it is *not* God's form of government—and the freedoms, wills, and rights our citizens espouse do not stand up against God's word.

God and Human Authority

In a society built on flawed concepts, we are nevertheless thankful for the freedoms we have. There are forms of government far worse than democracy, but as my unconverted father rightly observed, “It is our freedoms that will destroy us.” I still remember taking him to the National Frontier Trails Museum in Independence, Missouri, where we read a letter from a member of a wagon train heading for Oregon. Coming to a river crossing one person thought they should cross here, another thought they should cross over there, another lobbied for a different location—all suggesting an alternate crossing from the one the trail master chose. My father chuckled and remarked that human nature has never changed—everyone thinks he knows best.

God did not countenance freedom of religion in Israel (Judges 10:6–7). Of course, we can be grateful that such freedom, however corrupting overall, allows us to proclaim the truth today. But God knew our proclivity to latch onto humanly devised customs instead of His ways (Deuteronomy 12:29–32; Jeremiah 7:18). He also knew that people would marry those who worshipped other gods—and that spiritual adultery would be the result (Numbers 25:1–3; Nehemiah 13:23–27).

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Neither did God countenance unrestricted speech. There was a severe penalty under the Old Covenant for children who cursed their mother or father, not to mention those who committed blasphemy and took God's name in vain. Nor are we to speak evil of rulers and dignitaries—an admonition that many in the Church today ought to take far more seriously (Acts 23:3–5; Jude 1:8–11).

God knew that human leaders—whether parents or rulers—are far from perfect, but when people engage in condemnatory and derogatory speech against their leaders, the result will be division, rebellion, and chaos. “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.... Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake” (Romans 13:1–5). And do I even have to mention the problems brought about by unrestricted freedom of expression?

This is not to say that civil authority ever overrules God's authority (Acts 5:29). Nor does it mean that we cannot exercise our humanly given rights under human rule (Acts 22:25–29). Most of us live in nations promoting liberal human rights, but some live under serious oppression. And even in the former, but especially in the latter, we must look to the One who “rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom ever He chooses” (Daniel 4:32; see also 2:21; 4:17, 37). Enduring great oppression requires faith, perseverance, and sometimes even fleeing, but we should never take it upon ourselves to overthrow what God allows. Faith is required for more than physical healing, as shown in Hebrews 11.

Birthright Blessings—For Now

Those of us born in or living in one of the Israelite countries—especially in those descended from Joseph—have much for which to give thanks, not least of which is our freedom of worship and to proclaim the true Gospel to all the world. Despite all our faults, God has used the sons of Joseph, especially the U.S., to reach far beyond our own boundaries with the true Gospel message (Matthew 24:14) and the Ezekiel warning (Ezekiel 33:1–7).

But the comfort and prosperity enjoyed by most in the U.S. will come to an end, because they have forgotten their roots—who they are, and how God brought their forefathers out of slavery and into a marriage covenant. Our people have forgotten where our strength and prosperity come from, proudly ascribing our blessings to our own efforts—exactly what God warned against.

Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them... then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’ And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day (Deuteronomy 8:11–18).

Few in our world today realize the reasons for the great wealth and power enjoyed by the British-descended and American peoples, yet it is all there for anyone to read. “Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright; yet Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came a ruler, although the birthright was Joseph's” (1 Chronicles 5:1–2).

Yes, the birthright has gone to Joseph—not Reuben, not Judah. But all who live in the countries that have descended from Joseph are blessed and cursed together. If you have not recently reviewed *The United States and Great Britain in Prophecy*, perhaps this summer, the 250th anniversary of a great but troubled nation, would be a good time to do so.



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What It Means to Be Holy

Have you ever considered how people seem to endlessly throw about certain words without ever knowing their meaning? How often we hear the word *gospel* refer to music or just about anything but the actual message that Jesus proclaimed. However, readers of the *Living Church News* know that the word *gospel* means the good news of the Kingdom of God. That includes understanding who the King of that Kingdom is and how His Father gave Him as a sacrifice for our sins—so that we might have a part in that Kingdom.

But readers of this magazine also use other words that carry important meanings that they may not so clearly understand. One such word is *holy*, and understanding this word's meaning is no small matter! It is used more than 500 times in both the *King James* and the *New King James* versions of the Bible, sprinkled throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

The term *holy* is used in reference to God, but also to His saints—His faithful servants, to whom the instruction is given to “gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘*Be holy, for I am holy*’” (1 Peter 1:13–16).

Now, if God is holy and we are to be holy, would it not follow that we should be sure that we know what it *means* to be holy—not just in a fuzzy, intuitive sense, but in fact and in truth? How many can confidently define the word? If you cannot, you are hardly alone, and this article is not meant to embarrass anyone; it is simply written to enlighten us on this important subject.

Terms and Definitions

Many people tune out when someone turns to a dictionary, as dictionaries are less than exciting and not always clear. “Word salad” has become a popular expression used to describe language that leaves the hearers wondering what was said, and dictionary definitions may indeed seem to add to that salad at times. Nevertheless, it is sometimes both necessary and enlightening to turn to the dictionary.

The Hebrew word translated into English as *holy* may not have the first meaning you think of. At its core,

holiness means “separation” or “setting apart” (*The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 1988, “Holiness”). Such an understanding hardly comes to mind when we hear someone say, “holy cow,” “holy Toledo,” or “holy Joe.” And that is the problem—the word *holy* is thrown about in all kinds of contexts. We hear it routinely used in and out of the context of Scripture. As a result, when we read that God is holy, our understanding of what this means may be fuzzy at best and totally in error at worst.

Add to this another word, one found in Scripture more than 80 times in its various permutations—*sanctify, sanctifies, sanctified, sanctification*. As many marginal references show, the meaning of *sanctify* is to *set apart* (*The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, “Sanctification”).

Holiness and sanctification are very closely associated. “The dominant idea of sanctification... is separation from the secular and sinful and setting apart for a sacred purpose” (“Sanctification”). “Holiness is a general term used to indicate sanctity or separation from all that is sinful, impure, or morally imperfect; i.e., it is moral wholeness” (“Holiness”). We see that *sanctify* is a verb requiring action, while *holy* can be part of a noun, as when it appears in a proper name, but is usually an adjective—a word describing what something is.

In the case of objects, sanctification is the act of separating for a holy purpose. *Holy*, then, describes what a sanctified object has become—an object that has become separated. “They [the priests] shall eat those things with which the atonement was made, to consecrate and to sanctify them [set them apart]; but an outsider shall not eat them, because they are holy” (Exodus 29:33). We also see this in the case of the altar: “Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and sanctify it [set it apart for a sacred purpose]. And the altar shall be most holy [separated from anything sinful]. Whatever touches the altar must be holy [also in a state of being separate from the sinful or profane]” (Exodus 29:37).

Set Apart for What?

Many things are set apart in this world—perhaps dinner is set apart for a husband who is tied up in traffic. But that is not what this is about. As an adjective, *holy* describes what God is. He is the standard of what it means to be holy (set apart) in this context. Holiness is His nature. He is separate from all moral imperfection and is therefore

whole. He is separate from the world, and we are instructed to be separate from the world in the same way He is. “*Be holy, for I am holy*” (1 Peter 1:16). Therefore, to be like God, we must be different from this world.

When God told Israel which animals are good for food and which are not, He ended with this reminder:

For I am the LORD your God [*I am the One you are to follow*]. You shall therefore consecrate [which is translated from the same Hebrew word translated elsewhere as *sanctify*] yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. *You shall therefore be holy* [separate], *for I am holy*. This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten (Leviticus 11:44–47).

It is interesting in this context that one example of holiness for us is abstaining from the unclean animals that God calls abominations. “You shall not make yourselves abominable” by eating them (vv. 41–43). Revelation’s reference to “every unclean and hated bird” confirms what is written elsewhere: that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Revelation 18:2; Hebrews 13:8). We must conclude that there remains a difference between clean and unclean. It is God who at creation separated the clean and the unclean by specific traits—for example, distinguishing as clean those that

It is God who at creation separated the clean and the unclean by specific traits—for example, distinguishing as clean those that chew the cud and have divided hooves, as well as those that have both fins and scales—**setting what is good for food apart from the “clean-up crew.”**

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But God’s holiness, His separation from all evil, goes far beyond what we eat. Peter’s context for repeating the command to be holy is found in the verses leading up to his quotation: “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children,

not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:13–15). The Greek word translated here as *holy* has the sense of being pure, complete, consecrated. Peter quotes from the Old Testament, where the word means to be set apart. When we combine these ideas, we see that we are to be set apart to be pure, as God is pure. We are to be obedient children—separate from the impure, lustful minds we had prior to God’s calling. Peter’s language prescribes this holiness for “all your conduct,” which explicitly confirms the command’s all-inclusive scope!

Is this not also what Jesus meant? “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? *Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect*” (Matthew 5:46–48).

It is easy to claim to be a disciple of Christ, but quite another thing to practice holiness. “Therefore, as the elect of God, *holy* and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:12–14).

Practicing Holiness

I recently saw an “influencer” railing against Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers and wondered why anyone would listen to her. She had a remarkable display of facial hardware, tattoos, and wild hairstyle. It can be easy to dismiss such a person with such comments as we often hear: “What a loser!”

Her appearance, along with her irrational reasoning and strident voice, could make it difficult for some of us to see value in her, and we may have similar difficulty with seeing others like her as valuable. But what is the thinking of our Holy Creator? “The rich and the poor have this in common, the LORD is the maker of them all”

(Proverbs 22:2). Even more pointedly, “The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: The LORD gives light to the eyes of both” (29:13).

And who can forget what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount about the spirit of the law? “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother,

‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘*You fool!*’ shall be in danger of hell fire” (Matthew 5:21–22).

Many are puzzled by Jesus’ use of the word *fool* in this passage. After all, do not the Proverbs speak repeatedly about fools? But the original Greek word is from *móros*, from which we get the word *moron*, and it carries the connotation of *dull*, *stupid*, or *blockhead*. The subject of Jesus’ statement, as explained in verse 21, is that of anger and murder. Is the spirit of murder not the result of writing someone off as being of no value, of having no worth?

Even in the too-often-extreme cases of drug-addicted derelicts, they are still made in the image of God with the potential to become His children. As the saying goes, “Except for the grace of God, there go I.” This is not to imply that we should encourage alcoholic and drug-addicted panhandlers. Especially in the Western world, there are government programs and charities that will help such people if they truly want help, but as many of us have seen, it is not a job or a bus ticket that most of them want—they want the money. I confess that I do appreciate panhandlers who carry signs such as “Why lie? I need a drink,” or “Water is overrated. I need a beer.” You have to give them credit for their honesty!

Jesus addresses our attitude toward the derelict or the screaming influencer. Now is not their time, but their time will come. Our time is now, and if we want to be there to help these pitiful individuals in the future, we must first come to love them now. We must learn to see the big picture, as God does. We must not act like others in the world who write them off. We must separate ourselves from that worldly attitude. We must be pure as God is pure, holy as God is holy.

Not of the World

Holiness goes beyond what we eat and even how we look at others. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus explained that He chose His disciples to be different from the world, and He warned how that difference would cause those in the world to hate them. “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world [to be separate from it and pure], therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19).

We read of Jesus’ prayer to His Father later that night, confirming once again how different we must be from those around us. “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.... They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (John 17:14, 16). He also reveals the one who is behind the world and its attitudes: “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (v. 15).

Yes, the course of the world is directed by the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). He directs the politics,

the entertainment, the academics, the commerce, the approach of treating the effect of sickness rather than its cause. We must live in this world, but we must understand who is behind the path it is treading—and be separate from it. This is the challenge before us. Avoiding unclean animals is the easy part of being holy.

Paul warned us about the spiritual battle we face daily: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled” (2 Corinthians 10:3–6).

Our Savior’s prayer on the night He was betrayed tells us so much about what our relationship is intended to be with God the Father and our Savior. “Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are” (John 17:11). How wonderful it is to carry the Father’s holy name! But to *represent* Him as ambassadors of His own country we must be growing to be increasingly one with Him in mind and action.

Every year at the Passover, we read at least a portion of Jesus’ prayer in John 17, and perhaps the most beautiful and meaningful part for us begins with verse 20, where Christ explains that He is not only praying for those with Him at the time, but for all of His servants to come through the ages. His prayer was for us to be one with Him and with His Father—separate, holy, pure, just as They are:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:20–23).

Words have meaning. Even so, unless we act on them, they can become meaningless to us. Many of us were once in a worldly church. We very likely sang hymns proclaiming “holy, holy, holy,” but had little or no idea what we were singing. We walked out of a Sunday service only to become engrossed in the world—its politics, its off-color jokes, its obsession with entertainment, its attitude toward others. Let us meditate on the scriptures contained in this article. Let us truly embrace in every aspect of our lives what it means to be *holy*. (LW)



Lessons from the Life of Daniel

By **Peter G. Nathan**

Anyone who follows the writings, publications, and broadcasts of *Tomorrow's World* or attends with the Living Church of God and studies its teachings is likely to be at least somewhat familiar with the book of Daniel. We refer to it extensively in our literature and other media when we address the subject of prophecy. But it is also beneficial to examine the book of Daniel from the perspective of Daniel himself—an individual who was called by our heavenly Father and commissioned to undertake a particular role.

Daniel was a faithful servant of the Eternal, and Jesus Christ called him a true prophet of God. His contemporary Ezekiel described him as a righteous man of wisdom (Ezekiel 14:14; 28:3), and he was twice called a man whom God loved (Daniel 10:11, 19). We appreciate the way the Eternal used Daniel to record prophecies relating to the end of the age—and, beyond that, the glorious rule of the Kingdom of God. Daniel's faithfulness to God is evident from the beginning to the end of the book that bears his name.

Daniel lived in the best of times and the worst of times—times that coincided with the height of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and with Judah's demise and captivity. He lived in the time of the head of gold that appears in Daniel 2—Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire. Heads don't exist just for themselves. They control the whole body, and the mindset we face in our world today is, in fact, controlled by the mindset that Daniel had to contend with and resist at the end of the seventh century BC and on into the sixth century BC.

We live in the time of the ten toes of that Daniel 2 vision. Like Daniel, we live in a society in which the understanding of the true God has been lost. So, what lessons can we learn from Daniel as we live in this world that is so very much a modern-day Babylon?

Hope for Our Children

We don't know anything about Daniel's upbringing except what is most important: As a young man, he was taught to fear the Eternal. Someone—likely his parents, though perhaps another mentor—instilled in Daniel a deep respect for God

and His law. The same is true for Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Daniel's three compatriots. Their names indicate that whoever named these young men had God in mind: *Hananiah* most likely means “whom the Eternal gave,” we understand *Mishael* to mean “who is like God”—quite a challenge to give a child—and *Azariah* means “whom the Eternal helps.” Some think *Daniel* means “God is my judge,” while others think it could be “he who delivers judgment in the name of God.” Either way, it is a very appropriate name for the main personage of the book.

These men were born during the days of Josiah, the last righteous king of Judah, whose relationship with the Eternal did not penetrate very far into society. Yes, the parents of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were likely faithful, but they were very much a minority in that society—you might say they were like the 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal in the time of Ahab. We read of how quickly Judean society changed with the death of Josiah—his son and grandson were the most unrighteous kings of Judah.

Less than four years after the death of Josiah, the Neo-Babylonian Empire took parts of Jerusalem into captivity, and Daniel and his friends were included in that captivity. Judah existed as a nation for a number of years after that, but it was a time of apostasy, just as it is in this world today, where governments do not see God as a force to be reckoned with.

At the beginning of the book, we learn the reason for Daniel being in Babylon. “Then the king instructed... to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans” (Daniel 1:3–4).

What was Nebuchadnezzar hoping to do? Daniel and his compatriots were brought to Babylon to be enculturated in its ways. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make good Babylonians out of them—if they became good Babylonians, they could be sent back to Jerusalem to run it in Babylon's favor. Hence, their names were changed: *Daniel* to *Beltshazzar*, *Hananiah* to *Shadrach*, *Mishael* to *Meshach*, and *Azariah* to *Abed-Nego*. These new names represented a relationship

with the Babylonian gods Bel, Aku, and Nego. Nebuchadnezzar was hoping to encourage their development into loyal administrators, ones who would be of great service in maintaining a vassal state in Judah.

But we immediately see Daniel resisting this enculturation. He “purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs” (Daniel 1:8–9). When you obey God, He can make your enemies dwell at peace with you (Proverbs 16:7), and just like Joseph in Egypt, Daniel was favored by those over him. So, “the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, ‘I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king?’” (v. 10).

Daniel set out a test whereby the chief eunuch could see whether Daniel’s way would work. Had Daniel failed, he could have been executed along with the chief eunuch. He was involved in a life-and-death struggle from the beginning, just as we are spiritually—and even sometimes physically—as we live in this world. From Daniel 1 through Daniel 6, Daniel’s life is threatened time after time—because this world is hostile to the way of God—yet God is able to intervene and provide at every turn.

Again, the book tells us nothing of Daniel’s parentage, but Daniel’s statements tell us that someone instilled in him a very deep respect for his Creator. Faithfulness to that understanding was a hallmark of Daniel’s life—the laws, ways, and purposes of God were deeply etched into his makeup, even as he faced death. Daniel’s example offers encouragement to each and every one of us: It is still possible to serve God rightly in very sinful surroundings. We don’t have to submit to the ways of this world—if parents do their part, they can teach their children to have a respect for God, a fear of God, and an obedience to God, even at the end of the age.

Not of the World

We find in Daniel 2 that, because the wise men of Babylon could not solve Nebuchadnezzar’s problem, “the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree went out... and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. Then with counsel and wisdom Daniel answered... and said to Arioch the king’s captain, ‘Why is the decree from the king so urgent?’ Then Arioch made the decision known to Daniel” (vv. 12–15).

So, what did Daniel do? He “went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation” (Daniel 2:16). God gave Daniel boldness in the face of the

king. He was presented with a life-and-death situation, but he knew that God wanted him to live—and he was going to rely upon his God to provide the solution, not his own cunning.

When Daniel appeared before King Nebuchadnezzar to explain the dream that the king had experienced, he told the king, “The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these” (Daniel 2:27–28)—and with that he went on and outlined the vision that the king had seen.

Daniel was not only telling the king who could reveal the vision—he was also telling him who could *not*. This was a clear message to Nebuchadnezzar: *Your system is a failure*. Here we see Daniel continuing to resist the enculturation that the king sought. We find a connection between Daniel’s rejection of the Babylonian system and these words that the Apostle John later wrote: “All that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:16–17).

Daniel is a remarkable example of living and succeeding in a hostile world—a world that resembles our own in many ways. Throughout the beginning of the book of Daniel, Daniel faces situations that endanger his life, but his life is characterized by continual faithfulness to God and the courage that comes from trusting in Him. How else can someone tell a world-ruling emperor, *You are going to be like an animal for the next seven years* (Daniel 4:19–27)? Even throughout the changes in government—from one Babylonian king to the next and from one kingdom to another kingdom—God was giving Daniel wisdom in how to handle tense and dangerous situations, and He protected Daniel’s life all the while.

Our Source of Power

Having explained the Daniel 2 vision to Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel was given great position in the kingdom—but just a few chapters later our main character has disappeared into obscurity. In Daniel 5, during the reign of King Belshazzar, only Belshazzar’s mother remembers Daniel. He’s largely forgotten, yet he’s not out trying to memorialize his history in Babylon. He doesn’t need to—that’s for God to take care of.

In Daniel 5, we find Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, holding a great feast, using the vessels from the house of the Eternal. But we find an incredible comment from the queen—she did not attend the banquet, but because of the words of the king and his lords, she came to the banquet hall and spoke the following:

O king, live forever! Don't let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar, your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge and understanding, interpreting dreams and solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Beltshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation (vv. 10–12).

Here was an opportunity for Daniel to get his position back—but that was *not* Daniel's motivation. He was not concerned about preeminence amongst men, about how people looked at him. He was firstly concerned about his relationship with God, and his relationships with other people came from his relationship with God in a very powerful way. Daniel's desire was to make known the power of God and His ultimate control over the affairs of mankind. So, Daniel told the king,

Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor.... But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified (Daniel 5:17–23).

We are to live with the realization that God holds our breath in the palm of His hand, and we ought to glorify Him for each new day of life. Daniel glorified God in a remarkable

way—rather than placing glory upon himself, he directed all the attention toward God, who makes things known that could not otherwise be known. Daniel wanted Belshazzar to understand that he had been ignoring God at his peril—so much so that the Babylonian Empire would soon cease to exist. That night, the Medo-Persians stormed Babylon, and a new regime was installed.

Daniel was faithful—loyal to his God throughout his life. That was the focus of his very being. The power, wealth, and majesty of Babylon didn't lead him astray. You can go to the Pergamon Museum in Berlin and see the reconstruction of the Ishtar Gate with all its golden lions and blue-glazed bricks—Daniel's heart was not turned by that. He was given prominence in Babylon that seemed to disappear from time to time, and the Bible doesn't tell us *why*—but we *don't* find Daniel behaving like some Machiavellian prince trying to angle his way back into power. The allure of Babylon never turned Daniel away from his God.

One of the great lessons that Daniel knew is found in Deuteronomy 17:14–20: The power of a king resides in how deeply he understands God's word. As Christians, our source of power is our relationship with that word—in how deeply we make it part of our lives. Daniel's loyalty to God was very much rooted in God's word. That's why the glory, beauty, power, and wealth of Babylon never corrupted him—because his power and energy came from the word of God. Daniel was a great example of what David wrote: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments” (Psalm 111:10). Devotion to God's word was the real source of Daniel's power.

An Excellent Spirit

As we move into Daniel 6, we find a new king of a new kingdom—the second kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's vision in Daniel 2. The new king, Darius, wanted to reorganize the kingdom to suit the Medo-Persian way of doing things. So, he divided the kingdom into 120 satraps, and he put three governors over the satraps, “of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm” (Daniel 6:2–3).

Why was there an excellent spirit in Daniel? Because he was seeking to serve God, while the other governors would have been serving themselves. The result, of course, is that Daniel was thrown into the lion's den—a very well-known account, but just one in a litany of attempts on Daniel's life. Daniel refused to be absorbed into the culture around him, proving not only that power and wealth were not alluring to him in any way, but also that he was willing to give up his very life if doing so meant living in harmony with his God.

Truly, that is a feature of Daniel's life throughout the whole book—he sticks to what he has been taught. Daniel's life was built upon a foundation from which he was able to make judgments and understand the will of God, and God's Holy Spirit within him enabled him to remain faithful to his calling throughout his entire life. What is Daniel told right at the end of the book that bears his name? "But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days" (Daniel 12:13). This gives us a clear understanding of how God saw him—the Eternal essentially told Daniel in no uncertain terms, *You will have a place in the Kingdom of God.*

Many attempts were made on Daniel's physical life—and there have also been many *posthumous* attempts on his life.

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For example, in the third century AD, the philosopher Porphyry sought in his attacks against Christians to dispel the idea that Daniel was a real individual. To Porphyry, the book was a fake—and most theologians today agree with Porphyry. The challenge for you and me is to agree with *God*.

Life at the End of the Age

If we agree with God, we believe that Daniel was a real person. He set an example for us to learn how we should live our lives. How did Daniel retain his focus on God's Kingdom and His way? He was deeply involved in studying God's word. Daniel 9:1–2 shows that Daniel studied the writings of Jeremiah the prophet. He understood that these were part of Scripture—these were to be studied and understood.

We therefore read, "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet" (Daniel 9:1–2). Obviously, "the books" here refers to the books of God's word as they existed at the time—Daniel had access to copies of the word of God, and he therefore understood that God "would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem."

But it wasn't just the study of God's word that made Daniel remarkable. He was quick to turn to God in prayer—to seek understanding, to seek direction. He was told by an angel, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard" (Daniel 10:12). Sometimes we get on our knees and ask God for intervention—in our lives or in the lives of other people who are suffering—and the answer doesn't come immediately, but our words *are* heard if we are humble and seeking God. Not only did Daniel study God's word; he humbled himself before God. He prayed; he fasted. He was not seeking to glorify himself, but to glorify God.


The Apostle Paul tells us that we are surrounded by examples of people who have lived the life our Father wants us to live. "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). Daniel did that.

The life of Daniel provides many lessons for us, one of which connects to something Paul said to Timothy—another young man who had been brought up with a great respect for God's word. Paul summed up what

Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois had done for their son and grandson: "from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures" (2 Timothy 3:15).

What a wonderful privilege we can give to children who are reared in God's Church. They, like Timothy and like Daniel before him, can be taught the Holy Scriptures from their childhoods. And why is that important? Because they "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). Daniel was a faithful man. He was wise as well—because he heeded Scripture. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

The book of Daniel is given to us not just for prophecies, but as an example of how we can live our lives at this time, in a world not too dissimilar to Daniel's world. When the Neo-Babylonian Empire comes to its full, then Israel goes into captivity. Such were the days in which Daniel lived, and such are the days in which we live. Through the book he wrote, we are given lessons in how to live our lives during the most climactic times that man has ever experienced. How we do so begins with a deep respect and fear for our God and the way of life that He has set out for us. Daniel is a wonderful example of living that life. (LW)



Biblical Principles that Support Mental Health

By **Josh Lyons**

Mental health challenges have seen greater emphasis in recent years, and it has become more common for people to talk about them, though the problems being talked about are not new. Famous people like Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill suffered from depression, Churchill calling his battle against depression the “Black Dog.” Countless people battle various forms of guilt, stress, worry, anxiety, and depression, and these maladies have affected modern celebrities including Robin Williams, Michael Phelps, Simone Biles, Dak Prescott, Lady Gaga, Prince Harry, and many more.

In 2017, the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) reported that depression has become the leading cause of disability in the world, with an estimated 4.4 percent of the world’s population suffering from it, an 18 percent increase from 2005 to 2015. A May 17, 2023, Gallup poll reported that “the percentage of U.S. adults who report having been diagnosed with depression at some point in their lifetime has reached 29.0%” (“U.S. Depression Rates Reach New Highs,” *Gallup.com*). And these sobering statistics are specifically about depression, so they don’t include other forms of poor mental health.

Among the most tragic consequences of poor mental health is the scourge of suicide. A WHO fact sheet updated March 25, 2025, states that about 727,000 people worldwide commit suicide each year, and it is the third leading cause of death for people between 15 and 29 years old. Suicide has been a source of sorrow for mankind for millennia—and, heartbreakingly, it even touches those in God’s Church.

In recent years, I’ve talked to or known of many people struggling with mental health trials—severe challenges of this nature are more widespread than many of us might be tempted to think. Clearly, the battle for good mental health is an intense one, so it’s very important that we take it seriously—especially for the sake of our children, preteens, teens, and young adults. The *New York Times* best-selling book *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt, published in 2024, highlights how “the mental health of adolescents plunged in the early 2010s. Rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and

suicide rose sharply, more than doubling on many measures” (*AnxiousGeneration.com*).

Thankfully, as in all areas of life, God has given us loving guidance. In the booklet *Biblical Principles of Health*, Dr. Douglas Winnail wrote, “The Bible contains vital perspectives about mental health that have been overlooked and ignored in medical textbooks. Applying those perspectives could improve the lives of millions” (p. 43). Chapter five of the booklet is devoted to the mind and mental health. For more information about depression specifically, you can watch the very helpful *Tomorrow’s World Viewpoint* ten-part video series by Mr. Stuart Wachowicz. The title of the first video in the series summarizes the seriousness of these challenges today: “Depression: The Underrated Modern Plague.”

This article will highlight five of the Bible’s basic principles that help promote good mental health. It’s important to note that this isn’t an exhaustive list. Each of the following principles will be helpful in supporting good mental health, but while this article will focus on what individuals can do for themselves—and with the help of their family, friends, loved ones, and brethren—there are times when specialized help from trained professionals may also be needed.

1: Don’t ignore mental health challenges.

This is a simple but extremely important point, because poor mental health is a commonly ignored problem. If you or someone you know struggles with stress, worry, anxiety, or depression, it’s important not to ignore it.

In the past, mental health challenges were often brushed aside with advice like “toughen up” or “deal with it.” Yes, toughness is good—we don’t want to be mental “wimps” who fall apart easily over small challenges. But it isn’t wise to pretend that every mental health challenge can be overcome just by “toughing it out.” As in all things, biblical balance is the key.

The Bible shows us that mental health is important and that it’s common for people to have mental health challenges. Notice the following proverbs:

- “Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad” (Proverbs 12:25).

- “Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, and the end of mirth [gladness] may be grief” (14:13).
- “A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken” (15:13).
- “A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones” (17:22).

These proverbs describe anxiety, depression, sorrow in the heart, a broken spirit, and the role of a merry heart in promoting good health—and reveal that we all must, at times, contend with mental and emotional distress. Mental health challenges may be brought on by genetics, bad habits, and/or difficult experiences. Consider how many people suffer mentally and emotionally as adults because of abuse, neglect, and other trauma they suffered as children.

Mental health challenges are very real, and for many they are not easy or simple to overcome. Satan influences society to afflict mankind in any way possible, which includes creating an environment that encourages various forms of poor mental health. If you or someone you know suffers from severe stress, worry, anxiety, depression, or other such challenges, please take it seriously. Don’t ignore it. Acknowledge it and face it head on with God’s help and the help of loved ones, including your pastor and local ministry.

2: Maintain a close, personal relationship with your heavenly Father and Elder Brother.

Human beings are spiritual as well as physical. God created us with a “spirit in man” and a longing for eternity (Job 32:8; Ecclesiastes 3:11). Whether people realize it or not, we long for connection with our heavenly Father, just as a baby desires connection with its human father and mother.

The spiritual part of each human being is at the foundation of our existence—and our health. God designed each human being to receive His Holy Spirit as well—part of His essence and power—at baptism and to connect with Him and develop His holy and righteous character, which includes “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). The foundation of mental health comes from a close, personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

So, how can we maintain a real, close, and personal relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ? Prayer, meditation, and reading the Bible are the primary daily keys to this, accompanied by occasional fasting—not just on the Day of Atonement. As Dr. Roderick C. Meredith wrote in *Twelve Keys to Answered Prayer*, “We **need** to spend a lot of time with Him and with the Father to become *deeply acquainted*. Remember, what we do in this life prepares us to spend **eternity** together with these two divine Personalities. This is a **real** relationship and, as with any other, it must be developed over time. So learn

to *pray regularly* to God—spending *enough time* in prayer to become genuinely ‘acquainted’ with Him” (pp. 14–15).

The Apostle Paul explained to the brethren in Philippi, “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7, *New Living Translation*).

These verses explain what we should strive for. We should consider nothing too big or too small to pray about, telling God our needs, worries, desires, and challenges—while also being very thankful. Praying to Him on a regular basis and with sincerity can lead to tremendous closeness with God. The result will be His peace, which will *guard our hearts and minds*.

Everything in our lives is built upon our spiritual foundation—our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ—including our mental health.

3: Maintain close relationships with others.

Along with good spiritual health, we must strive to have good “social health.” Scripture says that it is unwise for us to isolate ourselves (Proverbs 18:1). Our relationships with God the Father and Jesus Christ come first, but we are also to have good relationships with our fellow human beings.

Christ set the example of prioritizing relationships, telling us that “whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:50). He showed concern for His mother by asking John to care for her after His death (John 19:27). He called His disciples His friends (John 15:15).

Maintaining good relationships with people we love and who care about us benefits mental health in many ways. First, it helps to keep us from struggling alone. “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9–12). Loving relationships can help us as we deal with mental health challenges, as there is safety in having a multitude of counselors (Proverbs 11:14).

It’s extremely important that young children and teens go to their parents if they are experiencing significant stress, worry, guilt, anxiety, depression, or thoughts of self-harm. And it’s just as important for adults to go to people who care about them—whether parents, other family, or close friends and brethren. Your pastor can be very helpful, as God’s ministers strive to be “helpers of your joy” by being caring listeners, encouragers, and spiritual guides (2 Corinthians 1:24, *King James Version*). Don’t hesitate to talk to your pastor if you’re battling poor mental health.

Maintaining good relationships and spending quality time with people has a very strong effect on our happiness. Since 1938, Harvard University researchers have been con-

ducting a study on adult development and happiness, and an article in *The Harvard Gazette* had this to say about a major lesson from this decades-long study: “‘The surprising finding is that our relationships and how happy we are in our relationships has a powerful influence on our health,’ said Robert Waldinger, director of the study, a psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital and a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. ‘Taking care of your body is important, but tending to your relationships is a form of self-care too’” (“Good genes are nice, but joy is better,” April 11, 2017).

Scripture confirms the importance of relationships with other people. The Fifth Commandment reveals the necessity to honor our parents, while the Seventh Commandment protects the marriage of husband and wife. Parents are to spend significant time with their children (Deuteronomy 6:7). Friendships are vital (Proverbs 27:6, 9–10, 17). The Apostle Peter explained the importance of having a sincere and fervent love of our fellow members of God’s Church (1 Peter 1:22). Much of striving to be disciples of Christ involves prioritizing our relationships by spending time with, helping, serving, and enjoying life with other people.

How can we build and maintain good relationships? Simply by spending time with people. In-person interaction is, of course, the best way of doing this. When in-person contact isn’t feasible, we can benefit from spending time with people through phone calls or video calls that let us have full, live conversations. Texting and social media can be used to keep in touch with people, but they don’t allow for deep interaction and quality time.

Friendship expert Marisa Franco told *NPR* that social media is like the snack food of connection, “and it’s like we’ve been subsisting on snacks of connection from social media rather than having the sort of nutrient dense meal of in-person connection” (“Why Americans are spending less time with friends—and what to do about it,” *NPR Illinois.org*, December 20, 2022). The rise of electronic communication has caused many to replace face-to-face time among friends, family, and brethren with screen time and shorter forms of communication.

Some of those forms are even addictive, drawing us away from direct human contact. We must fight to schedule and enjoy face-to-face time with other human beings, especially our brethren. And when we are face-to-face with other people, we must resist spending more time with our phones than with those people! God made us to be social and to enjoy life with those around us, so maintaining good relationships with other people is vital to our mental health.

4: Maintain healthy physical activity, sleep, and dietary habits.

Taking care of our bodies involves pillars of health that we hear about often—but, while these principles are in one sense

very simple, they are not always easy or convenient for us to implement regularly.

Until the last 150 years or so, people moved and exercised their bodies out of necessity because modern conveniences such as cars, airplanes, computers, tractors, power tools, ovens, dishwashers, microwaves, washing machines, and indoor plumbing didn’t exist or at least weren’t widespread. Simple and routine tasks like obtaining clean drinking water, dealing with waste, washing clothes, making a pie, or planting seeds involved substantial physical work. Today, however, we live in what seems to be the most sedentary age in human history, and we face a challenge unknown to most of our ancestors—not **moving our bodies** enough.

The Bible indicates that movement, exercise, and physical strength are good for us. Paul told Timothy that there is value in exercising the body (1 Timothy 4:8). Numerous scriptures show that Jesus and the Apostles regularly walked miles as they traveled between towns. The book of Proverbs teaches that strength is of value to both men and women, explaining that “the glory of young men is their strength” (Proverbs 20:29) and that the virtuous wife “girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms” (31:17). Many parents can attest to the fact that carrying children—especially as they become 30-, 40-, or 50-pounders—will strengthen the arms! Other verses portray obesity and gluttony in a negative light (Deuteronomy 32:15; Proverbs 23:21).

Moving our bodies has many benefits, including tremendous benefits for mental health. I’ve met more than one person who diligently exercises to help maintain a healthy mental state. Many sources explain these benefits of exercise: “Decades of research have established that movement has a positive effect on mental health” (“How Exercise Fights Anxiety and Depression,” *New York Times*, July 16, 2025). God tells us that there is value in simply moving our bodies—in fact, it is vital for our physical and mental health.

The Bible also teaches the importance of **sleep and rest**. Good, “sweet” sleep is a blessing from God (Psalm 127:2; Proverbs 3:24). One of the Ten Commandments instructs us to rest on the seventh day each week, and even God “rested and was refreshed” after recreating the heavens and the earth (Exodus 31:17). Jesus told His disciples to take a break and rest from their busy schedule (Mark 6:31). Scripture’s examples show that God teaches us the importance of sleep and rest—and we all know that importance from our daily experience.

Many studies show that sleep and rest affect our overall mood and mental health. A February 19, 2024, *New York Times* article titled “Your First Step Toward a Better Mood” stated in its subheading, “Poor sleep can make anxiety, depression and other mental health issues worse.”

An article published by *Insights Psychology* began with this statement: “Sleep is one of the most fundamental—yet often

overlooked—pillars of good health.” It went on to explain how vital adequate sleep is for emotional regulation: “A study published in *The Journal of Neuroscience* found that sleep deprivation heightens the brain’s emotional centers, particularly the amygdala, which is responsible for fear and aggression. Lack of sleep can make you more reactive to stress, intensifying negative emotions” (“The Psychology of Sleep: Why Is Sleep Important for Our Mental and Physical Health?,” October 29, 2024).

Sleep and rest are restorative, and God designed our bodies to need both—in large part to help facilitate positive thinking, emotions, and hormones, all of which greatly affect our mental health.

God also teaches us the importance of **nutrition** to our health. The Bible warns against gluttony (excessive eating or drinking), drunkenness, and eating unclean animals, and it encourages moderation and maintaining a healthy weight (Deuteronomy 32:15; Proverbs 23:20–21; 25:16).

A *Harvard Health Publishing* article reminds us that “what you eat directly affects the structure and function of your brain and, ultimately, your mood.... Multiple studies have found a correlation between a diet high in refined sugars and impaired brain function—and even a worsening of symptoms of mood disorders, such as depression” (“Nutritional psychiatry: Your brain on food,” September 18, 2022). One specific example of how diet affects our mental health is that serotonin—a neurotransmitter that helps to inhibit pain and to regulate sleep, appetite, and mood—is produced almost entirely in the gastrointestinal tract.

It’s well known that diet greatly affects our physical health, but it’s important that we remember it also has a significant impact on our mental health.

5: Avoid behaviors known to worsen mental health.

Many behaviors are known to worsen people’s mental health. Habitual sin, addiction, substance abuse, overwork, and inactivity can cause a person to experience a range of negative attitudes and emotions. Let’s consider two common behaviors that damage mental health.

One is **following news and politics in an unhealthy way**. Avoiding this can be a challenge, because we often need to be informed about local and world news for various reasons. But it can be all too easy to fall into unhealthy habits of following too much news and politics, become caught up in current political issues, or follow bad sources of news and other information. Much coverage of news and politics is extremely negative, and it bombards us in a seemingly unending cycle that can tempt us 24/7. It’s no wonder that news and politics can increase stress, worry, anxiety, and depression. I doubt many of us ever feel that watching news and politics acts as a *boost* for our mood or mental health.

As Mr. Gerald Weston and other leaders in God’s Church have explained, it’s vital that we follow news and politics in a *healthy* way. Here are a few practical points that can help:

- Exercise moderation as you follow news and politics.
- Be careful not to get too invested.
- Take a break from news and politics on the Sabbath.
- Be careful with the sources of information you follow.
- Take notice if you become very passionate about certain political issues.
- Stay away from conspiracy theories and disreputable sources.
- Use the Bible and the Church as the lens through which you observe news and politics.

No matter what source of news we watch or read, we must remember that the true unspoken message always amounts to, “Here is today’s terrible news and politics in Satan’s world.” It’s important to be aware of the negative impact news and politics can have on our mental health so that we follow current events in a healthy, balanced, and self-controlled way—keeping our overall focus on the pure, lovely, good, virtuous, and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8).

Another common detriment to mental health is **the misuse or overuse of social media**. We’ll focus on social media specifically here, but other forms of technology, media, and entertainment can have similar impact.

Many reports and studies in recent years have highlighted the dangers of social media, especially for children and teens. Australia passed legislation that bans youth under 16 from using platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat—and other nations have followed suit. In 2024, the United States’ Surgeon General called for a warning label to be placed on social media platforms. Famous technology executives, including Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, have limited their own children’s use of technology.

The well-documented and widely reported fact is that misusing social media often leads to anxiety and depression. It’s not difficult to understand why, because misusing social media often causes people to violate biblical principles. For example, spending too much time on social media will likely decrease time spent on other important activities like prayer, Bible study, exercise, sleep, and in-person interaction with family and friends. It can be easy to let social media steal our most precious and fleeting resource—our time.

In addition to taking time away from activities that can improve our state of mind, social media can expose us to negative influences and effects on mental health, such as bullying, addiction, body-image issues, comparison to others (especially when confronted with the often false and unrealistic ideals of

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The Warning for the Last Era

By **J. Charles Ogwyn**

The book of Revelation—a mysterious book to many—contains an urgent message for God’s Church at the end of the age, immediately prior to Christ’s return. Revelation 2–3 contains seven distinct messages that God gave Jesus Christ to reveal to His servants (Revelation 1:1). These messages, initially addressed to seven congregations in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), are prophetic in nature and address situations and circumstances throughout the history of the New Testament Church, spanning from the time of the Pentecost described in Acts right up to Christ’s return.

One of the purposes of prophecy is to help the people of God understand the sequence of events in God’s plan and where things currently stand. When Christ described to His disciples the signs that would take place signaling the end of the age and His return, He told them, “See that you are not troubled” (Matthew 24:6). In other words, when we witness the tumultuous events taking place, we should not be frightened but rather should understand what they represent in the context of God’s plan.

God revealed to His servant John the things that will take place so we can prepare for them and not be caught unaware. The message to the last era in New Testament Church history is a message delivered in love—with the fervent desire that the hearers of this message would take it to heart (Revelation 3:19). Christ’s message is that the Laodiceans are not ready to meet their Maker and that, unless they make significant changes, they will *not* rise in the air to meet Him at His return. What a terrifying thought!

In His address to the Laodiceans, Christ uses various symbols to illustrate His point. He begins by comparing their works to their municipal water supply. Laodicea did not have its own local source of water, relying instead on water brought from elsewhere via aqueduct. Unlike the therapeutic hot springs in nearby Hierapolis or the cold and refreshing water from Colossae, the water in Laodicea was widely known for being lukewarm, heavily laden with minerals, and not pleasant to drink.

Water is used in Scripture as a symbol for God’s Holy Spirit (John 4:10–14; John 7:38–39). When talking with the

woman at the well in Sychar, Samaria, Christ said that “whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). This stands in sharp contrast to the water at Laodicea, which was neither healing nor refreshing. Instead of being filled with the Spirit of God and on fire with zeal and excitement for the coming Kingdom of God, the Laodiceans were self-satisfied and complacent—lukewarm. As a result, Christ said He would vomit them out of His mouth.

First-Century Laodicea

Laodicea was located along an important trade route and contained a large Jewish population, along with Syrians, Greeks, Romans, and other inhabitants. Roughly 200 years before Christ, Antiochus III moved 2,000 Jewish families from Babylon and settled them in the area. Laodicea was wealthy enough that its Jews sent 20 pounds of gold each year to Jerusalem. It was likely from this large Jewish population that Laodicea’s early Christian community was drawn.

Three principal industries in Laodicea were banking, textiles, and medicine. Large monetary transactions were frequently conducted, and the city minted coins depicting various pagan gods and Roman rulers. Wool from this area was prized for its soft feel and rich, black color. The city was so famous throughout the empire for the black robes it produced that it was nicknamed *Trimataria*—after *trimata*, the name of a locally produced tunic. The medical school was widely known for ophthalmology, and a locally produced eye salve, Phrygian powder, was exported throughout the empire. Located at the crossroads of north-south and east-west trade routes, Laodicea was a very cosmopolitan city.

And it was prone to earthquakes. In fact, in AD 60 a particularly devastating earthquake struck the Lycus river valley. Laodicea was destroyed, along with several other cities in the area. Although the Laodiceans could have received imperial funds to aid in the city’s reconstruction, Laodicea “recovered by its own resources, without assistance” (*The Annals of Tacitus*, Book XIV, section 27). It was a point of pride to Laodiceans that they were rich enough to not need outside help to rebuild as other cities did.

Physical Riches vs. Spiritual Riches

Physically, the Laodiceans were exceedingly rich, but spiritually they were destitute. Christ focused on this distinction to highlight the contrast between their physical and spiritual conditions. In many ways, their physical condition was the exact opposite of their spiritual condition.

Christ revealed that the Laodiceans' sentiments about rebuilding without imperial assistance after the AD 60 earthquake were an accurate reflection of their overall attitude: "I am rich, increased with goods, and have need of nothing." He then pointed out that they were, in fact, spiritually *destitute*, yet they couldn't even see it. For a city renowned for its expertise with the eye, they couldn't even see the pitiful state they were in.

In the Parable of the Sower, Christ described what can happen to those who hear and understand the message of the Kingdom of God—but who allow the cares of this life to overshadow the word of God in their time and attention. "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22).

In other words, such recipients of the word become distracted and let the opportunity to be part of the Kingdom slip by. Instead of becoming Spirit-born members of the God Family—to rule and reign with Jesus Christ for all eternity, experience the fullness of joy and the pleasures of God forevermore, and be part of the incredible future He has planned, which we can't fully wrap our minds around—they are sidetracked by the things that are passing away. Christ admonished His followers to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19–20). Laodicea was indeed *very* rich, but not in the way that matters to God.

A popular misconception is that a person can have it all—that it really is possible to keep your cake and eat it, too. But the reality is that everything has an opportunity cost. The cost of pursuing one opportunity right now requires that other opportunities go unpursued. We only have 24 hours in each day. Our time is limited, our energy is limited, and our attention is limited. Constrained by limited resources, our choices reveal the priorities we are pursuing. We may say that our priorities are in a certain order, and we may even believe what we say, but how we use our time makes plain what we value most.

We can't pursue wealth and worldly acceptance and simultaneously acquire treasure in heaven and acceptance before God. Christ noted that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). The Laodiceans spent so much focus on their physical state of affairs that their spiritual affairs were in dire need of attention.

The truth is that without the aid of God's Spirit, we can't even discern our own hearts (Proverbs 21:2; Jeremiah

17:9–10). Much like the titular character of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes*, the Laodiceans had been tricked by the god of this world into believing that they were gloriously attired, but the reality was that they were spiritually naked.

Urgency Required

Emphasizing that His return is at hand, Jesus Christ says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (Revelation 3:20). This symbolism illustrates the need for urgency. The Laodiceans were told to be zealous and repent, and before Christ's return there will be those who *should* know better, but who will still deceive themselves into thinking that what they see happening around them is just another cycle in history (2 Peter 3:3–4).

Those who rely on physical senses to discern the times in which they live will see all things continuing as before. But those who rely on God's Spirit to perceive the signs of the times can't help but be filled with excitement and zeal for what is about to happen. The time is at hand! "Behold, the Judge is standing at the door" (James 5:9).

If we really see and grasp the significance of what is about to happen, we will be filled with a sense of awe and excitement. We are standing at the threshold of the greatest turning point in the history of the world! The significance of what is about to happen cannot be overstated. What an awesome future awaits those who rely on God's Spirit to understand the magnitude of this moment in history and our part in it.

The purpose of the letter to the Laodiceans was to rebuke and correct them into making the necessary changes so they could rise in the air to meet Christ at His return. It begins by painting a vivid picture of the difference between their self-assessment and Christ's assessment, and it goes on to give a prescription for corrective action, a reference to the urgency of their situation, and a reminder of the reward awaiting those who heed the message. It is truly a love letter—not the "mushy" kind filled with pleasantries, but one written with the fervent hope and desire that its recipients will take corrective action and be prepared to meet their Maker.

That message has particular relevance today, because Laodicea represents the stage of Church history that we are in. The message to Laodicea represents Christ's warning and advice to the overall Body of Christ at the end of the age. Our job is not to hear the message and judge others, but rather to examine ourselves—to ensure that we recognize the times we are in and to "move forward on our knees," as Dr. Roderick C. Meredith admonished us so many times.

As we consider this, let's strive more than ever to have the ears to hear what the Spirit says—for our good (Revelation 3:22). ^(LW)



Fostering Respect

By **Editorial Staff**

Comedian Rodney Dangerfield’s famous trademark was one complaint: “I get no respect!” Though he made a joke of it, his plight hits home with all of us. We have all been the victims of discourtesy at one time or another in our lives. Yet respect is one of the most important qualities God wants us to develop.

As we were growing up, perhaps strangers and older children did not show us respect, and although this sometimes hurt, we may have learned to take it in stride. But if our parents failed to respect us, the hurt was far deeper. As we grew, if our peers did not hold us in high esteem, it could challenge our attitude even more. Then, with age—just when we were hoping to gain the respect that is supposed to come with maturity—we were crushed when younger people showed us disrespect.

Disrespect can hurt. But what is the real cause of disrespect between people? We all want to feel that we are worth something. We want to be loved, honored and respected for our contributions to family, school, workplace and community. So, what can we do to build other people’s respect for us—and to learn how to cope when our respect for others is not reciprocated? We can glean from Scripture some basic principles to help us develop respect for others and to earn respect in return.

Learn to Give and Get Respect

Children need to be taught to show respect. They must learn that God loves all people of every race and color and that every member of the human family has vast potential in His eyes. And children learn by example. A loving and nurturing home environment provides a fundamental training ground for giving and receiving respect. “Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul” (Proverbs 29:17). Children who do not learn how to show respect to others are likely to face great difficulty receiving the respect that will help them thrive and grow.

Sadly, in today’s Western world, millions of children enter school without having received even the most basic lessons in giving and receiving respect—and, as a result, their

teachers often must act more like wardens than teachers. God powerfully exhorts all mothers and fathers, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

So, what can young people do if they grow up in a household where respect is not taught and nurtured—if the adults around them do not set the best examples and do not seem “worthy” of respect? Although this may be a “hard saying” for some, God did not promise it would be easy when He commanded, “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 5:16).

God promises a physical blessing in this life to those who obey His commandment. It is worth the effort! It is not that we should look the other way if ungodly parents pull their children into activities that would destroy their relationship with God; rather, we must simply show right respect that is owed to the “office” of parent. Young people are often surprised to discover how differently the adults around them behave when they hear a sincerely spoken “Yes, sir” or “No, sir”—or “Yes, ma’am” and “No, ma’am”—in response to a question or request. The simple act of listening to an adult attentively and responding with courtesy will often gain a young person great favor with the adults in his or her life. Once they have learned to show consistent courtesy to parents, it will be that much easier to extend respect to others.

And respect should not just flow between young and old; it is a vital part of every healthy marriage! Some married couples may have forgotten—or become lax in fulfilling—the obligations they assumed upon taking their marriage vows. “Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33). Indeed, respect has sometimes repaired even the most difficult marital situations.

Do not underestimate the value of common courtesy in a marriage. Husbands, praise and encourage your wives regularly—not just when they do something you think is extra-special. Say, “I love you.” Demonstrate by your words

and deeds that you respect and deeply value your wife's role in the household—maybe even doing some of the household chores from time to time. Wives, if your husband is not as respectful or responsive as you think he should be, take the first step and find a sincere compliment you can give him. If he barks at you in anger, surprise him by responding with love (Proverbs 15:1). No, this may not be a panacea for every troubled marriage—but many underestimate the immense healing that can come as a result of sincere respect, consistently shown.

This principle also applies in the workplace. Notice: “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God” (1 Peter 2:18–20).

Do you ever catch yourself acting like a “prima donna” instead of a team member? Remember: “God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Corinthians 12:24–27). Do you show due respect to all the fellow members of your workplace “team”—from the CEO to the most junior intern? The team with the greatest prospects for success is the one in which each player is willing to play at full capacity

So, what can young people do if they grow up in a household where respect is not taught and nurtured—if the adults around them do not set the best examples and do not seem “worthy” of respect?

and to let others play with full support from every team member. “Hogging the ball” or “second-guessing the coach” is not a winning team strategy.

Pride and Respect

No matter our best intentions, disrespect will occasionally intrude into our families, our teams, and our workplaces. Why does this happen? One fundamental reason is pride. What does God say? “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble

yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:5–7).

Do you think you know better than your parents? Do you think, “My boss is an idiot”? God does not list either of these as valid excuses for failing to show proper respect. Yes, we have all fallen short (Romans 3:23). But God makes His expectation plain: “‘For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,’ says the LORD. ‘But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word’” (Isaiah 66:2). Hard as it may sometimes be, God expects us to be humble in dealing with a proud parent or a difficult boss—or an unresponsive spouse. And He promises a great reward to those who faithfully display this character trait:

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25–28).

How can we maintain a respectful attitude of service to those around us? The Apostle Paul gives a valuable formula: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:3–5).

We all want respect, just like Rodney Dangerfield. But if we are to receive it, we must give it to those around us—and not just those whose favor we seek. We must do to others as we would have them do to us (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 7:12). As we develop the habit of giving right respect to all our fellow human beings—individuals created in God's image as potential members of His family, for whom Jesus Christ was willing to sacrifice His life—we will find that our relationships will improve. In humility we will demand less respect from others, yet by our fruits we will gain more respect than ever before. And we will serve as living testimonies of God's way, as beacons of light in a coarsening world. “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3) ^(LW)

Who Is Your Enemy?

By **Kinnear Penman**

“I’m my own worst enemy!” Have you ever said that? This may be an admirable statement of self-awareness—that we have, perhaps inadvertently, done things to hurt ourselves. That awareness can be good, because it might help us learn to avoid self-damaging behavior in the future.

But factually that statement is very, very wrong. You are *not* your own worst enemy. There is a powerful being who hates you and is tirelessly working to destroy you. He strives to prevent you from gaining the eternal life that God is offering you (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 4:17–18; Titus 1:2).

The Apostle Paul warns the Ephesians not to “give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:27), then goes on to tell them what they are to do.

In verse 28, he tells them they must do fruitful work. In verse 29, he warns them not to engage in unwholesome talk—

rather, they should seek to edify others. Then he writes, “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice” (v. 31). We need to take this to heart and act upon it.

Scripture shows us how quickly Satan can gain mastery over us if we let down our guard. Christ publicly gave Peter high praise, saying, “Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). But when Christ began to plainly teach His disciples about His arrest, beating, death and resurrection, Peter began to rebuke and contradict Him (vv. 21–22). Peter did not understand that Christ would have to die so salvation could be opened for all.

What was Christ’s response? “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (v. 23). Peter, under Satan’s influence, was expressing Satan’s thoughts. Satan has us in his sights. He will do all he can to trip us or lead us astray, anything to divert us from the path to salvation. He *hates* us.

Our Enemy’s Devices

Paul, in a corrective letter to the Galatian brethren, asked them, “Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This per-

suasion does not come from Him who calls you” (Galatians 5:7–8). He asked “who,” not “what.” Someone was hindering them, and that being was Satan, who is still actively trying to hinder and destroy every human being.

Paul goes on to list “the works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19–21). These are serious attitudes and behaviors, including adultery, idolatry, sorcery, wrath, and murder. They are works that will never bring us lasting joy, peace, or well-being. Paul then writes, “I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 21). Satan wants us to cling to such attitudes and sins so we will be denied God’s Kingdom.

Satan once experienced the beauty and glory of that Kingdom; he served in the throne room of God. In Ezekiel 28:11–19 we have “a lamentation for the king of Tyre,” and this is an

account of the fall of Satan. “You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty... [but] you became filled with violence within, and you sinned.” Satan now wants to infect *us* with precisely the attitude

of pride that doomed him. If we succumb to his sickness, we will not enter God’s Kingdom.

Paul informed Timothy that “the Spirit expressly says that in latter times [our times today] some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1–2). Satan and his minions know prophecy and can see the signs of the end-times. They will hasten to attack our every weakness, so we must reinforce our spiritual lives and with God’s help build a barrier against the fiery darts of Satan (Ephesians 6:16). In fact, we must put on the whole armor of God (vv. 10–18).

We must be watchful and durable, and we must work hard to fulfill our calling, supporting God’s Work. Sadly, some Church members will be ensnared by the Devil, becoming motivated to do the Devil’s work rather than God’s (2 Timothy 2:26). What a tragedy!

Brethren, this is a mortal danger to us. We are not our own worst enemy—Satan is!

Let us ask God to reveal to us where we are weak, and let us work with Him to shore up our defenses against our true worst enemy. Then we can expect to soon hear the wonderful words, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matthew 25:23). (LM)

Acceptance

By **Bob Rodzaj**

Throughout life, we all fall into numerous circumstances that we do not create, nor can we control—circumstances that can frustrate, devastate, anger, depress, or even paralyze us. Some examples include the death of a loved one, a natural or man-made disaster that causes severe damage to our home or community, a debilitating accident or serious illness, the loss of a job, a difficult marital or family relationship, or a troublesome boss, fellow employee, or neighbor. Though we may be tempted to ask why we are suffering a problem, asking such a question will often just compound that problem.

But if “Why?” is not the right question, what *is* the right question? What is the right response to dealing with life’s challenges? The answer begins with *acceptance*.

Acceptance is recognizing and acknowledging the reality of our situation or circumstance. It is the opposite of denial. Rather than *resisting* the truth, it’s about *yielding* to the truth.

A quote attributed to pioneering American psychologist and philosopher William James states that “acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune.” Frustration, anger, depression, or paralysis may be natural reactions—but they are *not* acceptance. Until we accept what *has* happened or *is* happening to us, we cannot properly move forward.

Years ago, I was wisely told, “The world is not a perfect place, and that’s upsetting to you.” It stung me, but it was true.

Acceptance is recognizing and acknowledging the reality of our situation or circumstance. It is the opposite of denial. **Rather than resisting the truth, it’s about yielding to the truth.**

Since then, I’ve had to learn to ask God to help me accept and handle circumstances that are not the way I’d like them to be.

Ask the Right Questions

Our human tendency is to try to avoid any or all unpleasant situations as much as possible, so we often refuse to accept circumstances that upset us. We try to do everything we can to *change* those conditions—but sometimes that’s impossible. Consider the Apostle Paul’s perspective on the circumstances he faced (2 Corinthians 4:6–11, 16). He knew that God desired to form Christ in him, and he knew that everything God either

allowed or orchestrated was aimed at achieving that ultimate goal. Armed with that perspective, Paul could place all his hardships in their proper context.

One key to accepting difficult circumstances resides in determining what is *within* our control and what is *beyond* our control. Our own actions and reactions are within our control. Everything else is beyond it. This is why I was also advised not to ask *why* when facing difficult circumstances, but to instead ask, “What can and should I do about it now?” This helps focus our thoughts and energies in the right place, and it’s the first step to moving forward. It means asking such questions as:

- Do I need to seek counsel?
- Do I need to let myself grieve and seek support from others who have faced the same challenges?
- What assistance or benefits are available?
- Do I need to change my perspective about my family situation—or my approach to my spouse or children?
- What choices do I have in dealing with my illness?
- Can I ask for a transfer at work, or make a lateral transition to another position?
- Is it time to look for another job or to move somewhere that will be better for me?

There are often solutions open to us if we ask the right questions—if we’re willing to look at things differently and not try to force our circumstances to go the way we want them to.

We must always remember that, regardless of the twists and turns that come our way, we are in the capable hands of God, who uses our experiences to form His mind in us and to secure our place in His Family (Romans 8:28). God can use *any* circumstance to achieve His purpose. It is crucial that we respond to our hardships with God’s greater purpose in mind—otherwise, we will make our circumstances even more difficult in our futile efforts to control the way we experience life.

With this in mind, we should commit all our circumstances to God, beseeching Him and trusting Him to direct and to intervene (Proverbs 3:5–6). With a proper perspective—a big-picture focus—and with God’s capable direction and intervention, our difficult circumstances in life need not frustrate, defeat, or paralyze us. Instead, armed with God’s help and a right approach, we can find acceptance and a way forward that will produce peace of mind—and, in the end, the mind of God in us. ^(LN)



TITUS 2:3-5

Woman to Woman

Waiting on God

By **Elizabeth Stafford**

I hate waiting. Whether I am stuck in traffic, in a long checkout line, or at a doctor's or dentist's office, it is totally frustrating. I am fairly sure I am not alone in this. In fact, I have never met another woman who enjoys long commutes, grocery lines, or traffic jams. However, most women I have known in God's Church have come up with various ways to redeem the time, whether by listening to a recorded sermon or educational radio in the car, engaging in good conversation, or, if seated and waiting, reading helpful books, whether with physical copies or on a mobile device. Even so, no matter how we pass the time, most of us still hate to wait.

An expression we have all probably heard refers to something as actually being "worth waiting for." For me, that would be especially true of my children. After nine long months of either nausea or back pain and heartburn, along with other *not-to-be-named* trials of pregnancy and more than 20 hours of *hard* labor, both of my children were *definitely* worth waiting for. And our Father in heaven is patiently waiting on each and every one of us, too. As the Apostle Peter wrote, God is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). It is hard to imagine, but our Father has been waiting patiently to add children to His Family since the foundation of the world, when He determined to give up His only Son for all of us. He has confidence that we are worth waiting for!

As women of God, we are all trying to develop the fruits of God's Holy Spirit, which includes being longsuffering or patient in our daily lives—not always an easy task. We are tested in this area every day, whether by our husbands, our children, our relatives, or our work—or simply by our own imperfect human nature. It is a constant battle. If you are like me, you have proven to yourself again and again that human beings are not capable of doing this on our own strength. Rather, we can only make any lasting change in becoming more patient or longsuffering by seeking daily the help of Christ, who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). I have come to see that the one thing *most* worth waiting for can sometimes be the *hardest* of all—that is, to wait on God.

What does it mean for us to wait on God? It means that we are prayerfully trusting His timing, whether that timing regards when He chooses to intervene and save us out of our trials or how quickly He chooses to bestow certain blessings that are desires of our heart. Why is it so hard? Well, most often, I find that my timing would be much faster than God's. I think we all probably want to be saved from trials and given the desires of our heart much more quickly than God knows is best for our spiritual growth.

Biblical Women Who Waited

Looking at the biblical examples of Sarah and Rebekah, two godly women, I am encouraged to find that we are not alone. Abraham's wife, Sarah, set us a wonderful example as a submissive wife (whose spiritual daughters we are, according to 1 Peter 3:6). However, Sarah had a very difficult time waiting on God to provide her with a child in His perfect timing. Becoming impatient, as we often do, she thought she would go ahead and do things her own way, and she even talked her husband into her idea.

The book of Genesis describes how Sarah thought God was restraining her from having children, and in her impatience and human reasoning, she decided to talk her husband into having a child through her Egyptian maid (Genesis 16:1-3). When we look at the results of that decision, we know why God gives us these examples to learn from, because the resulting family discord and eventually violence and wars between Sarah's descendants and Hagar's can still be viewed in the Middle East to this very day.

I am sure we can all look at our own lives and see so many times when we "got ahead" of God when it came to something we thought was good and that we wanted very much to have or to do for either ourselves or our family. We can also undoubtedly see the wonderful results that came during those times when we *did* wait on God to bless us or our family members in a particular way. One of my favorite scriptures in this context is Proverbs 10:22: "The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it." One way we can sometimes know that something we want comes from God and is according to His will is when there is no sorrow as a result of having it, either then or later.

Sometimes it is not just for us that we must patiently wait on God to provide; we may need to wait on His intervention or a special blessing for family members or close friends. Often, we will want to be “large and in charge” and fix things we feel are unfair. In reading over the account of Sarah’s daughter-in-law Rebekah in Genesis 27, we see that she had the same tendency as Sarah, in that she chose to make things happen herself—in this case, for her favored son.

One lesson I take is that Rebekah did not ask her husband, Isaac, before acting. She probably knew he would not go along with her plan. Our husbands can give us perspective and help keep us from making foolish decisions in most cases, and they are a safety net that God has put into place for our protection. Rebekah, however—instead of waiting for God to give the birthright blessings to her son Jacob—intervened in the process because she thought she was right about her son’s character and her belief that he should have the firstborn blessings. However, Jacob was not at all ready at *that* time for what his mother tried to take for him when she disguised him and fooled her husband into giving him the blessing. In fact, even Jacob himself was hesitant to take part in the deception, out of concern that he might be discovered and receive a curse—but Rebekah would not listen to him either, instead telling him, “Let your curse be on me, my son” (Genesis 27:13).

Once we have decided something for ourselves, it is easy not to listen to others—and how very sadly this turned out for Rebekah in the end. She basically lost her son because of her deception, because Jacob had to flee for his very life and live far away from family and friends for a good many years. Rebekah’s unwillingness to wait on God also caused her to miss out on the great blessing of seeing her son married and later

spending time with her little grandchildren during their formative years! What a valuable lesson for those of us who are mothers of mature children—to be willing to trust fully that God will bless and intervene for our grown children and that we can safely wait for His perfect timing in their lives.

Waiting for God’s Intervention

I know from hundreds of conversations that so very many of us are waiting for God to intervene in serious trials in our lives or in the lives of our families. Some of us live alone, some with a hostile husband or family members. Others are in dire financial or health trials. Many of our lovely and dedicated ladies are waiting on God to provide them with a godly husband, to give them a less stressful job, or to bless them with children.

What are the blessings of waiting on God? God’s word gives us enormous and beautiful promises concerning those who are willing to trust in His timing and will instead of their own. One of the most encouraging of these promises is found in Isaiah 40:31: “But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” Scripture also gives us this uplifting assurance: “The LORD is good to those who wait for Him” (Lamentations 3:25). When we are worn out by the daily stress we face from work, family, or friends, it is reassuring to know that we can find rest in our God while we “wait patiently for Him” (Psalm 37:7).

During the low times, we as women—created to be sensitive and empathetic—can so easily become saddened or depressed by the large and small stresses of life. Yet we can also take heart from the words of David, who himself suffered many trials and loss of children, yet still encouraged us, “Wait

on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD” (Psalm 27:14). We all want to be mature Christian women, and to accomplish this we have to follow the instruction to “let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete [mature, of full age], lacking nothing” (James 1:4).

Let us continue to help each other to look forward to the day when all our patient waiting will be over. Our reward has been promised: “To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time... for salvation” (Hebrews 9:28). ^{LN}



Ordinations

Mr. Westerfield Akinyele was ordained a deacon on the 2025 Feast of Trumpets by Pastor Hugh Stewart. Mr. Akinyele serves in the Sevenoaks congregation in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Chapman was ordained a deacon on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread by Pastor Winston Gosse and Elder Lorne Ketch. Mr. Chapman serves in the Halifax, Nova Scotia, congregation in Canada.

Mr. Robert Davis was ordained a deacon on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread by Pastor Bobby Jacques and Elders Lawrence Johnson and Mike Rivet. Mr. Davis serves in the Jackson, Mississippi, congregation.

Mr. Kasani Kotamo was ordained an elder on March 21 by Evangelist Peter Nathan and Pastor Hugh Stewart. Mr. Kotamo serves in the Sevenoaks congregation in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Terrell Taylor was ordained a deacon on the First Day of Unleavened Bread by Pastor Bobby Jacques and Elder Tom Young. Mr. Taylor serves in the Ocean Springs, Mississippi, congregation.

Mr. Brian Warner was ordained a deacon on March 21 by Pastor Barry Walker and Elder Norman Aitchison. Mr. Warner serves in the Abbotsford congregation in British Columbia, Canada.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. Les and Gail Puntch celebrated their **60th wedding anniversary** on December 19. They enjoyed a trip to Sunset Beach, and on the Sabbath of December 20 the Kannapolis, North Carolina, congregation honored them with a cake and flowers. Mr. and Mrs. Puntch were baptized together by Mr. Bob League and Mr. Richard Ames on March 19, 2013. They are active members of the congregation and enjoy serving with their local brethren. They have one daughter.

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the online world), sinful content, laziness, reduced ability to concentrate, overstimulation of the brain, encounters with online predators, and more. All of this can cause a person to experience more stress, worry, guilt, anxiety, and depression.

As the Church has long taught, sin often lies not in “the thing” itself but rather in the wrong use of the thing. Social media can be used in a healthy and positive way, such as to keep in touch with family, friends, and brethren who live far away; to follow positive and helpful content; to watch, read, and listen to Church material; and more. But it must be used with great moderation and self-control, and we must always be aware of the danger it can pose to mental health—especially in the lives of young children and teens.

Modern society has brought many benefits, but also many dangers, especially to our mental and spiritual lives. We must

be on guard against behaviors that harm mental health, and these include becoming too wrapped up in news, politics, and social media.

Christ’s Love in a Sound Mind

Satan is the god of this age. As he does his best to hurt and degrade mankind, one of the enormous dangers he inflicts upon modern, technology-saturated society is that of poor mental health. It is a plague and crisis of our time that we must take seriously.

But we’re far from alone in this struggle. God has given us principles that can help support good mental health. Ultimately, He wants us to have a healthy mind, a sound mind, peace of mind, and the mind of Christ—and He *will* help us. (LN)

In Loving Memory

Mr. James (Jim) Arnaldo, 92, finished his race on April 14. Mr. Arnaldo was a longtime elder in God's Church and served for decades across New England and in Canada. After many years pastoring the Maine and New Hampshire congregations, he retired and moved to Rhode Island where he attended in Pawtucket. Even in his later years, he was happy to serve the local congregation with sermonettes and by providing anointing for those in need. Over the past few years, he faced a number of health struggles, but he always seemed to bounce back and surprise the brethren by being right back at services. He loved God's way of life and was dedicated to it until the very end. His example of loyalty was an inspiration for so many brethren who knew him.

Mrs. Regeina Berry, 82, died on January 2 after a long and productive life. A widow, she is survived by three sons and was also blessed with many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Berry was baptized in 1974 and was a much-loved member of the Berea, Kentucky, congregation. She was an early member of the Global Church of God, very dedicated to her faith, and supportive of the Church and the Work of God as it continued in the Living Church of God. Her loving care for the brethren was a good example to all of us. We will miss her.

Mr. David Bolin, 71, died January 30 at his home with his family by his side. He was a retired bricklayer with many other handyman talents. A longtime member of the Amarillo, Texas, congregation, the main focus of his life was his commitment to God, his family, and his brethren. A quiet man, he enjoyed visiting with guests at his home, birdwatching, fishing, and watching sports and old westerns. Mr. Bolin was preceded in death by his parents; his son, Austin Bolin; and one brother, Dan Bolin. He is survived by his wife, Lanita; two daughters, Samantha Williamson and Emily Fite; one brother, Rick Bolin; two sisters, Nicki Elmore and Kim Voss; and nine grandchildren, as well as other relatives.

Mr. Johnny McKinney, 79, died on January 5. Mr. McKinney was baptized in 1976 and served as a deacon in the Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Denver, Colorado, congregations. He will be remembered for his love for God and for joking and laughing with others.

Mr. Gerald Richard, 96, of the Moncton, New Brunswick, congregation, died February 17. He is survived by his wife of 69 years, Annoncia; three children; and five grandchildren. Mr. and Mrs. Richard were called by God later in life and were both baptized in 2024. His hope was in the resurrection.

Mrs. Mildred Shears, 91, died February 15. She was a longtime member of God's Church and attended the Halifax Nova Scotia, congregation. She and her late husband of 64 years loved to travel in their motor home to many different Feast sites. She was always a joy to be around, as she loved God, laughter, family, and friends. Her favorite things were going to services, dressing up, singing, and being with her family and Church brethren. She will be greatly missed by all who knew her.

Mrs. Mabel Cairns, 98, of Belfast, Northern Ireland, ran her race and died peacefully on November 28, surrounded by her loving family. Mrs. Cairns and her children attended services with the Worldwide Church of God back in the early 1970s. After decades, she and her nephew started attending services with the Living Church of God, and two of her children later began attending as well. She was baptized on April 2, 2017. Mrs. Cairns was a shining example and well-loved by those who knew her.

Mr. Eric Wood, 87, a longtime member of the Llanelli congregation in South Wales, United Kingdom, finished his race on December 21. He went to sleep peacefully, having recently seen both his children and acknowledging his faith in a future resurrection. A dedicated servant of his brethren, he will be sorely missed.

Electronic Service Requested

Learning to Trust God

Have you ever had a time in your life when things always seemed to be going wrong, no matter how hard you worked to keep them going right? Those can be some of the hardest situations in which to stop and take the time to find the solution—even when you know your relationship with God is on the line.

I was going to college, broke, and living in an apartment with three roommates who had no regard for God. I worked at a fast-food restaurant, and—because the job did not pay much—I worked as many hours as I could possibly get. So, after eight hours of school during the day, I would go straight to the restaurant and work into the night to make as much money as possible to pay the bills.

I knew that my spiritual life was failing, because my Bible study and prayer life were being severely compromised. Even so, the seriousness of this situation did not really sink in for me until I was counseling for baptism. The minister and I talked about my life, and I told him about my dilemma of having to work so many hours in addition to the time that school required of me.

He then compared my situation to the parable of the sower, which says that “the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:13–14). He showed how, though I was excited about the truth I had been learning, I still needed to make sure that I did not allow temptation to cause me to fall away. He also helped me understand clearly that though it was important

to work and do my part, I could not let the cares of this world overtake me, compromising my Bible study and prayer life so that I could not bear fruit.

After realizing my sin of putting so much before God, I repented and turned to Him. I worked the hours I was given and did not purposely seek any more. Though I did not see how things could work out, I put my faith and trust in God, knowing that I had to obey and draw close to Him above everything else.

I had to trust that God is loving and faithful and would somehow open a door. Several days later, after I had fasted, He did just that. An older gentleman and his wife offered to let me live with them at their home. And not only did they let me stay with them—they did not allow me to pay them anything! Furthermore, the same kindly man offered me a job making more than double the money I was making at the fast-food restaurant—and it was a job in the very field that I was going to school for, giving me vital and foundational experience.

A very important lesson from all of this was that even when we cannot see how turning from our way to God’s way is going to work, we *must* trust Him and put our priorities fully into His hands. When we learn to obey in faith, He always provides a way. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5–6). We can have full trust and faith that His ways are better than our ways and that He will hold us up and provide all our needs.

If you are faced with a seemingly unsolvable problem, you can turn to God with your whole heart—and He will reveal the solution!

—Mike DeSimone