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Be Thankful for God's Master Plan

Dear Brethren,

"Where are you going to the Feast this year?" How many times have you heard that question? How many times have you asked it? The question is often asked as a starter to engage someone in conversation, but the importance of and appreciation for keeping the Feast must not be forgotten. Some of you will be keeping your very first Feast of Tabernacles this year, and you are not sure what to expect. Others have been keeping it for decades. But we all share a sense of excitement and anticipation.

While going for a walk one evening recently, I was meditating on how thankful we need to be for the wonderful blessing of God's ordained Festivals. We can easily lose sight of their importance in the anticipation of planning a road trip or flight to some new location and of sharing meals with family and friends. We love to see the happy smiles on the faces of first-time Feastgoers—but, in all of this, are we thankful to our Creator for giving us the wonderful gift of seven annual Festivals that explain His master plan for humanity?

Many years ago, a prominent evangelist in God's Church mentioned that you cannot understand the plan of God if you do not keep the Holy Days. Reading a booklet on the subject does not implant in your mind their full meaning. Over the years, I've come to comprehend what he meant. Of course, we understand that there are shut-ins who have never been physically able to keep these special days fully, and we know that God does not condemn people for not doing something that is beyond their physical capabilities. God loves for us to be zealous, but He is also the God of wisdom.

Also, due to women bearing and nursing children, God only *requires* men to attend. "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which

He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles" (Deuteronomy 16:16). Requiring only the men would have been especially important at a time when women bore more children and travel to the Feast would have required much more strenuous effort than it may today. In His Olivet Prophecy, Jesus pointed out this difficulty regarding travel at a time of fleeing. "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!" (Matthew 24:19).

However, barring such extenuating circumstances, the Feast of Tabernacles is for the whole family, that "you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household" (Deuteronomy 14:26). Consider also what took place on the Feast of Trumpets after the Jews returned from Chaldean captivity: "Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. Then he read from it in the open square... from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law" (Nehemiah 8:2-3).

We then read of their keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles two weeks later: "So *the whole assembly* of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness" (8:17).

To fully comprehend the meaning of those days requires doing something—taking meaningful action. They are not a vacation or convention. We go to the Feast for a very specific reason: "that you may learn to fear the LORD your God al-

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ways” (Deuteronomy 14:23). What does this mean in practical terms?

The Feast Is Not Just for Fun

Observing the Feast is a learning process that takes place over many years for most of us. At first, we may naturally focus on the physical aspects:

And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks.... And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household (Deuteronomy 14:23, 26).

What excited me most after my introduction to God’s commanded observance was how much fun I could have enjoying the desires of my heart with the money I had faithfully saved for the occasion. “You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year.... But if the journey is too long for you... then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires” (14:22, 24–26).

God does not give us perfect understanding all at once, and through various experiences I learned that there was a better way. Yes, I still enjoy fine meals, but the focus is not so much on my taste buds as it is on warm fellowship with like-minded individuals. And I have found that the best fellowship is not a planned fishing excursion or taking a sailboat out on the Pacific Ocean, but the unplanned sharing of time with someone I only met at that Feast. To put it succinctly, I have learned from Paul’s example and from what Jesus said: “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35).

It takes time for Christ to be formed within us (Galatians 4:19). As Paul also said, “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).

How Thankful Are We?

God’s master plan is spelled out in His Festivals and Holy Days. So, how thankful are we for Christ’s sacrifice as remembered in the sobering Passover service? How thankful are we that we can know what true liberty is—learning to put sins out of our lives and having the burden of our past removed in baptism—as pictured by the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

How thankful are we that God has given us His Spirit to become firstfruits? God’s Spirit is *not* something we feel, but is the mind of God—His law and way of thinking—written in our minds and on our hearts (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16–17). That Spirit must be nourished by responding to it as it guides us to go against our ungodly desires (John 16:13; Hebrews 5:14). To learn more about the Holy Spirit—what it is and what it is not—see our resource *John 3:16: Hidden Truths of the Golden Verse*.

How thankful are we that Christ will return, that He will remove the great troublemaker, that He will set up His government on earth and bring peace and abundance to all peoples everywhere? How thankful are we for the hope of the resurrection and God’s gift to reign with His Son? And what can I say about the amazingly encouraging meaning of the Last Great Day?

Of all people on earth, we have been given the knowledge and opportunity that only a precious few possess. Let us be deeply thankful, let us learn to fear the Eternal our God always, and let us never let go of our crown!



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EDITORIAL By Gerald E. Weston

Build the Foundation Now

It is a common belief among many that the Church is made up of seniors. This is not entirely accurate, however. It is true that many smaller congregations—and even some larger ones—have few if any children, but there is a quiet upsurge in young adults attending the Living Church of God. It is quite evident here in Charlotte, but not confined to Charlotte alone.

It is obvious to any visitor that the Charlotte congregation is a youthful congregation, but I did not know exactly how youthful. So, I asked Mr. Joshua Penman to do a quick database search of how many children—from newborn through the age of 17—we have in Charlotte. The actual figure took us by surprise—more than 100. This was back in April, and it did not cover several “buns in the oven,” as the expression goes. Since then, babies have been born, several young wives have become pregnant, and some young singles have begun planning their weddings.

There are also a good number of couples who have three, four, or more children—and that is not here in Charlotte only. Not long ago, our Alberta, Canada, congregations had a handful of young single adults and only a few small children. But over the last dozen years, a major transformation has taken place in Edmonton, Calgary, and Grande Prairie—the shouts and laughter of little children are often heard in these congregations nowadays. Some congregations in Texas and Missouri also go contrary to the “old Church” narrative. And our summer camp numbers are up significantly again this year. We are seeing a slow shift back to more historic family norms in the Church.

Why Families Are Important

I grew up hearing words to the effect of, “As the family goes, so goes the nation.” Many have attributed a similar sentiment to historian Will Durant, who reportedly described the family as the nucleus of civilization. Others have called the family the foundation of society.

Australian Member of Parliament Kevin Andrews gave a notable lecture, described in the Warrane College article “The Building Blocks of Western Civilization.” Outlining his views on the importance of marriage for the future of Western civilization, Mr. Andrews stated that “the greatest threat facing the western world was

not global warming, the financial crisis or the threat of radical Islam, but ‘the steady, but continuing breakdown of the essential structures of civil society—marriage, family and community.’” Mr. Andrews listed eleven causes for the crisis taking place in marriage and family. Among them:

- A decline in the numbers of people who are getting married
- An increase in cohabitation as a substitute for marriage, though cohabitation is less stable than marriage
- Families having fewer children overall
- Both parents being in the paid workforce

Though some applaud these trends, Mr. Andrews pointed out what has since become obvious to many: “As thousands of studies now indicate, these trends have had many negative economic, health and social consequences for adults and children and have had a significant impact on society more generally” (October 7, 2015).

God’s Festivals and Families

The Holy Days and Festivals portray God’s plan to transform the world. The need for the fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets is made clear by the fact that all of mankind’s attempts have utterly failed to reform society. Satan’s world is built on false and deceptive principles, and the Prince of Peace must return to destroy it and to usher in a new way based on better values.

The Day of Atonement reveals why our world is going the way it is. Satan is the spirit power—the god of this present world—who is directing its course. True lasting peace and harmony cannot come until his influence is removed and that course changed.

We celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles as portraying that future time of harmony, cooperation, tranquility, and universal prosperity, but how will this be achieved? Sermons during those days can, must, and will say much about how this will happen. But under it all—behind Christ returning, Satan being removed, and new Spirit-born kings and priests supporting the Prince of Peace—will be the building blocks of a new world order: the family.

Jeremiah on Marriage

Marriages are celebrated with joy and gladness, but the prophet Jeremiah describes how such joy and gladness is removed when sin brings destruction upon a nation. “Then I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride. For the land shall be desolate” (Jeremiah 7:34).

Interestingly, God commanded Jeremiah not to start a family of his own in the land that would soon go into captivity. “The word of the LORD also came to me, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place’” (Jeremiah 16:1–2). The verses that follow describe the horrific disaster about to fall upon the nation, when even women and children would die gruesome deaths. We know that Jeremiah’s life and that of his scribe Baruch were spared when Jerusalem fell to the Chaldeans. So, why was he told not to start his own family? Could not God have spared his wife and children, too?

Jeremiah’s actions were to be signs to the people, as were the actions of some other prophets. God’s instruction to Jeremiah not only told him what would happen to his nation’s populace, including the women and children—it explained that joy and gladness, as found in marriage, would be removed from the land. “For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Behold, I will cause to cease from this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride’” (Jeremiah 16:9). To drive the point home, Jeremiah mentions this a third time (25:10). Even the future fall of Babylon will remove the voice of the bride and bridegroom (Revelation 18:23).

Family is a constant theme in God’s word. We rejoice today when a man and woman come together to form a new family, and Scripture gives special importance to this institution. Consider that Christ’s first miracle, turning water into wine, took place during a wedding festival. And the book of Ruth is all about family: first the tragic loss of Naomi’s sons and Ruth’s husband, then the colorful story of how she married Boaz, and concluding with a description of the lineage of David—and ultimately Jesus—arising from that union.

The Future of Family

One passage often read during the Feast of Tabernacles is found in Jeremiah 33, and I remember Dr. Meredith frequently referring to it in his Feast sermons during my early years in the Church: “Again there shall be heard in this place... in the cities of Judah, in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, *the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the*

bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say: ‘Praise the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for His mercy endures forever’” (vv. 10–11).

The world will rejoice over many things once Christ establishes His rule. War, oppression, pandemics, and poverty will end. We may first think of streams breaking out in the deserts, and of people healed from blindness, deafness, and crippling afflictions—but the thread of joyous family life is central. Nearly every year at the Feast, more than one speaker will read Zechariah 8:4–5: “Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.”

When we think about the wolves that will dwell with the lambs, the leopards that will lie down with the young goats, and the calves that will play peacefully with the young lions, let us not forget who will lead them all (Isaiah 11:6). And who will “play by the cobra’s hole” and “put his hand in the viper’s den”? Are they not the “nursing child” and the “weaned child” (v. 8)? We think about lions, bears, leopards, lambs, and goats, but behind this beautiful Millennial scene are the men and women who bring children into the world.

Begin at the Beginning

As strong marriages will be a feature of Christ’s Millennial reign, it is good to meditate on why this foundational institution will at that time be treated very differently than it is commonly treated today. The origin of marriage is lost in our current world. Few recognize that marriage is a divine institution ordained of God, as we say in our marriage ceremony. We also recognize that marriage is a type of the relationship between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:31–32; Revelation 19:6–9). It is easy to pass over this truth and not understand that the failure to understand it is at the heart of the world’s marital problems—and, sadly, it is also at the heart of marriage problems within the Church. Too many people just don’t get it!

Recognizing God as the author of marriage reminds us of His existence and His authority. At least three of the Ten Commandments directly address the family—the commands to honor one’s parents, to not commit adultery, and to not covet another’s wife or husband. Additionally, to take another’s lawful spouse is stealing, a violation of the eighth commandment. And how many murders have occurred to “free” someone to marry another? Some of the most high-profile criminal cases begin with adultery and end with murder—including, as we see in the pages of Scripture, the case of David and Bathsheba.

During the Millennium, there will be no doubt about God’s existence and His authority. There will be no more excuses nor suppressions of this truth in unrighteousness

(Romans 1:18). People will come to understand who instituted marriage, who designed male and female, and who determines the role of each. Women will no longer deride Paul as a chauvinist and dismiss the man's role as the head of his family unit (Ephesians 5:21–22). Men will come to understand the admonitions given by Peter, who was himself a husband (1 Peter 3:7; Matthew 8:14).

Books have been written about the differences between men and women, but the Apostle Paul presents a simple truth soberly and succinctly in Ephesians 5: Men are validated when they know that their wives respect them, and women are validated when they know that their husbands love them. So, why do these conditions usually prevail during courtship, but too often diminish after “I do”?

Before We Come to the Millennium

As we so often hear, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong pointed out that marriage is not a 50/50 proposition. On the contrary, it is 100/100—which is essential for forming and maintaining a happy marriage. None of us is perfect, yet God never tells us to meet the other person halfway. Instead, He tells us what our individual and personal responsibilities are: love your wife, respect your husband. God expects us to do our part, regardless of what the other person does.

I was involved in many marriage counseling sessions during my decades as a field minister, and the similarity in counseling situations was remarkable. So often I would hear a woman describe a problem that I personally saw in myself, and the man would describe something that I saw in my wife. Many problems arise from innate differences between men and women, and people who divorce a spouse often find that the next one has the same frustrating traits.

Another repeated counseling pattern is how each blames the other. When questioned, each would admit that the only person anyone can change is the self, but almost immediately following that admission begin accusing the other. “If my spouse would do this, I would do that.” In other words, “I’ll meet my spouse halfway” in a 50/50 marriage. When we understand that the marriage relationship is a type of Christ and the Church, we see that Jesus did not meet the Church halfway. No, indeed—He went 100 percent of the way by giving His life for us “while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8). We also see His love expressed in how far He went in His love for the faithless “congregation in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38).

Marriages and parenthood will not be handled perfectly during the Millennium. People will still struggle with human nature. However, two powerful destroyers will be removed—Satan the Devil and “the course of this world,” which he directs (Ephesians 2:2). In our age, he has confused men and women about their roles and responsibilities.

Those Who Will Rule

None of us can change our past, but we can change our here and now—and our future. It is true that there is far greater pressure on marriages and families in today's world than there was in the past, but those who overcome those challenges will rule with Christ upon His return. We can bemoan the fact that our spouse is the way he or she is, or we can humble ourselves and get in line with God's laws, thereby regulating and protecting our families.

I remember a couple I once counseled for marriage. It did not take great insight to realize that they were a mismatch. He had never been married—she had children from a previous relationship. She was older. She was more educated than he was. And when they took a professional marriage-preparedness evaluation, this mismatch was made clear.

The evaluation program spelled out the odds of a marriage working for a period of time, and their results suggested that their marriage would last less than a year. The odds of their staying together for three years were considered to be only 10 percent. When I showed them the results, the woman responded, “If it were zero, I would not go forward, but I like a challenge.”

I moved shortly after that, but they did get married—and the last I heard was that they were still married after three years. I lost track of them, but if they are still alive and together, I rejoice with them. This is not to suggest that this couple made a wise decision—according to Proverbs 22:3 and 27:12, they did not. However, their story illustrates something that too few understand: the value of determined commitment, even under difficult circumstances.

When I entered Ambassador College in the fall of 1965, Mr. Herbert Armstrong was able to report that there had only been one divorce among the graduates of the college. But that all changed when the Church deepened its understanding regarding grounds for divorce. The resulting change in policy was correct, but many couples who may have been struggling saw an exit—they took the path that looked easy on the surface, and they threw in the towel. Sadly, they could have taken a better course. They could have humbled themselves, submitted to God's wisdom instead of their own, grown in godly character and love for one another, and provided a stable environment for their children.

As goes the family, so goes the nation—and the world. Whether in today's world or tomorrow's, those couples who look into the mirror to see their own shortcomings; who learn patience, tolerance, and forgiveness; who consider others as better than themselves; and who strive to fulfill their own God-given role in marriage can work out whatever problems they face. Let us learn the lessons now that we will teach others in the future. (LN)



Grow Your Joy

By **Dr. Jeffrey Fall**

Charles Dickens' famous work *A Tale of Two Cities* begins this way: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." M. Scott Peck's influential book *The Road Less Traveled* opens with, "Life is difficult." As we near the end of the age, we all probably agree with both of those sentiments.

Life *is* difficult in Satan's world. It's disheartening to see nations split apart politically. At every turn, there are differences of opinion, and children are being indoctrinated with confusion on gender identity and every other evil lifestyle. The cost of living has gone up, which makes it much harder for individuals who depend on a fixed income. The world is polluted in so many ways, including our food supply and the environment.

The end of the age is, in a way, the worst of times—yet it's also the best of times.

How so? Because we have the vision of the coming Kingdom of God, just over the horizon in time. We have the blessing of being offered protection if we're close to God. We have the potential blessing of being part of His firstfruits, seeing the transition from the age of Satan to the age of the family and government of God. We have the potential to receive eternal life in a few short years. We do live in a time of trouble, but we have that tremendous blessing of looking forward to what God has offered us. If we believe in and live God's way of life, we will prove to Him that we can be trusted to teach others in the years ahead, in the family of God.

With these truths in mind, we find the keys to how we can have a sense of joy during such a difficult and dangerous age. Let's examine how, even as we enter the worst times in all human history, we can have not only a sense of joy, but *great* joy in our lives.

What Is Joy?

Do you have great joy in your life, right now? Many of us, perhaps most, would say, "No." How can we say we have great joy when there are so many things working against us, so many things that are opposed to our living God's way of life in Satan's world?

Part of the problem comes from confusing joy with happiness. Happiness is an emotion—it changes often. God never intended us, as human beings, to be in an emotional state of happiness all the time. After all, we're being trained to hate evil (Proverbs 8:13). If we really love God and see what sin does to people's lives, we are sure to enter states of *unhappiness* sometimes as we live in this sinful world.

Joy, on the other hand, is different from an emotion—it's a fruit of God's Spirit, a part of His mindset, a piece of who He is. Like the rest of the fruit of the Spirit, joy manifests in us when we are close to God. It comes from Him. He is always expressing it, because He has joy over His creation, over adding children to His family.

"May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in His works" (Psalm 104:31). What does *rejoice* mean? It means to express joy. If we just bottle joy up, we're not really reflecting it. God experiences joy in what He is doing, and we should, too. Even the angels shouted for joy at the creation of the universe (Job 38:4–7). They knew it was something special.

Joy is part of the bigger plan of God. If we know we're right with God, it gives us joy to know that we're part of His purpose. We're on board with God. We have a bright future. It's about the big picture, not what's happening right now around us.

We see the big picture of what God is doing: Christ said that "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). If you know you're walking with God and are a part of His plan, you know that nothing in your life can destroy that.

God expects us to develop a sense of joy in our lives, even in a difficult age. If anyone could be excused from having joy, it would have been Christ, knowing He was going to be tortured and die. But notice: Just hours before He died, Christ said to His disciples, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). He knew what would transpire, but He was thinking of the big picture. His death was part of God's plan, and He knew it was not the end: There was a future beyond it—not just for Him, but for all of us to be born into the family of God at the resurrection.

Christ was talking about the profound joy we can have from knowing God's plan—knowing about the resurrection to eternal life, knowing there will be no more death or sorrow or pain, and knowing that it all applies to us. God is not looking for people who are forever disheartened because of their circumstances. He's looking for people who have a vision of their ultimate destiny, who understand their potential. Part of our assignment in developing God's character is to develop a mindset of joy in the completion of God's plan.

No Joy Without Gratitude

We need to realize that joy and gratitude toward God are inextricable from each other; we have true joy when we are supremely grateful to God for all He has done for us and all He offers us in the future.

People in the world always want more—more wealth, more territory, more power. But disciples of Christ have a different focus, because “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:3–4). To lust is essentially to *wish* you had something God does not want you to have. If we have very little joy in life, we should ask, *Have I been grateful? What am I grateful for?*

We should be grateful that God has personally called us and chosen us—individually invited us to receive God's Spirit and to participate with Him as He fashions us and prepares us for a place in His Kingdom and family. None of us earn that; we weren't chosen because we were so brilliant and righteous and lived such wonderful lives up to that point. God called and chose each of us for His own reasons—no one comes to Christ without the Father's call (John 6:44).

That is an amazing privilege to think about—God has offered us life on His plane of existence, and He has overlooked, in His mercy, *so many times* when we have yielded to our sinful nature. We will be members of His “species”—members of the actual family of God, fully glorified, as Christ was glorified at His resurrection. We will never be equal in authority to God the Father or to Jesus Christ, but we will always be able to contribute and accomplish great things in the future that is eternity.

Are you grateful for God's creation, the incredible beauty and vastness of the universe? Eventually, we'll all have a part in that universe—not just planet Earth. Human beings are struggling to get to Mars, but that's just the tiniest baby step compared to what God has in mind for us.

We're told, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). In other words, we are

to be like-minded. Are you grateful to God for the blessings He grants to others? What about the blessings He will grant to others through *you*? We have the potential to help bring others into the family of God—now, by preaching the Gospel, but also in the Millennium and in the Second Resurrection. Isn't that something to be grateful for—perfect job satisfaction in the family of God?

Gratitude is tremendously important. It's hard to be thankful and miserable at the same time; if we're truly thankful for the future, it's hard to be miserable in the present. What is happening in our lives today is an infinitesimal piece of the big picture—and focusing on it degrades our joy.

Repentance Brings Joy

When we have drifted from God's intention for us—to any degree—it hampers our joy. Satan has deceived the whole world, and even those of us with God's Spirit are often deceived in one way or another about our own actions, thoughts, words, attitudes, and emotions. The world can still influence us, as it is full of Satan's enticements.

Notice David's approach to God—he lost the joy of being close to his Creator, and he asked God to help him restore it. “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,” he prayed, “and uphold me by Your generous spirit” (Psalm 51:12). We need to ask God to help us see the big picture and be excited about what He is offering, not just be depressed in the present.

David realized that he had drifted far from God, had become too entangled in the world. He had lost sight of God's purpose in his life, had become distracted and blind, and had sought pleasure in a horrendous sin. But when he realized that he had abandoned God, he repented; he turned again to God, disgusted with himself, and asked God to restore the joy of His salvation.

If we need the joy of our salvation restored, it could be that we're still too focused on the pleasures of this world. We can become focused on how much we have materially, forgetting that, in time, we will inherit the entire earth (Psalm 37:11, 22; Matthew 5:5). We can become discouraged by our poor health, forgetting that God promises us *perfect* health when we are born into His family. As Mr. Adam West reminded us in this year's May–June *Living Church News*, God is the One who makes whole. And, while it's good to mourn the loss of a loved one, if we fall into despondency over it we may be forgetting that God's promise of resurrection applies to all human beings; if we can't expect to see our loved ones again in the first resurrection, we can almost certainly expect to see them in the second.

As human beings, it's easy for all of us to be self-absorbed at times. We can't allow self-pity to stop us from finding joy in the big picture—what God is doing in our lives to lead us into a glorious future. I recall that, years ago, in the World-

wide Church of God, there was an older lady who consistently complained, saying things like, “There’s not enough love in the Church.” But what she really *meant* was that there weren’t enough people giving to and serving *her*. That was her mindset—and she lived a joyless life. On the other hand, I remember another older widow who had very little, living in what could be called a shack—yet she always seemed to have joy, even though she had virtually nothing materially. She knew the Kingdom of God was coming.

Whatever we lack, that lack is only temporary. It’s not forever. God is looking at what will be permanent—building within us a consistency He can trust.

This life is merely training for our next responsibility as members of the Kingdom of God—to teach others God’s way of life, watching them succeed in their families and develop their bright futures. And as we find joy in this life, even when our circumstances are painful, we show God that we believe Him—not just believe He exists, but believe what He says. **There is a big difference between believing in God and believing God: “Even the demons believe—and tremble”**

Looking to the Future

David asked God to restore the joy of his salvation. If we need the same joy to be restored in us, it means we have—at least somewhat—lost our joy in what God is offering, of what He is doing. How real is it to us?

We all need vision—the ability to see, in our mind’s eye, the future reality of the Kingdom of God on earth. If it is not real to us, and if our place in it is not real to us, we will never be motivated as we need to be. Do you see clearly to Christ’s return, to your becoming a born member of the family of God? Vision is the ability to make that reality more real to you than your present situation.

Notice a few of Jesus Christ’s words on this subject:

The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light (Luke 11:34–36).

When our minds are set on the Kingdom of God, our bodies are full of light, and we live accordingly. But when we’re focused on the negative aspects of life in this world, when our vision is cloudy, we are full of darkness—we are off track, and there is not much joy. We need to make sure we see the big picture and know where we are heading, and not just live in the present.

In effect, Jesus was saying, *When your vision is clear, your whole life is full of light*. Life goes better with a godly mindset—no matter what’s happening right now, you know you are a part of God’s purpose and His plan. You have a *wonderful* future to anticipate.

Spiritual vision gives greater significance and meaning to what might otherwise seem like the mundane details of our lives. By way of analogy, not many of us would normally be excited about filling bags with sand or dirt—but we would probably be more enthusiastic about doing it if we knew we had to protect our homes and families from a major, imminent flood. The same is true with our lives in general. We have to anticipate what’s coming—protection that comes from the great God as He accomplishes His purpose and brings the world to a new age.

All too often, we may feel that our daily lives are unimportant. But as we look at the examples of spiritual heroes of faith, both in Scripture and in the Church today, without exception they share the characteristic of spiritual vision. It motivates as nothing else can.

This vision reminds me of lyrics written years ago by Johnny Nash: “I can see clearly now, the rain is gone. I can see all obstacles in my way. Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind. It’s going to be a bright, bright, sunshiny day.” When we have vision, we still have obstacles in our way, but they become less significant the more we make the Kingdom of God our focus, the more we let it consume our worldview. As we do so, the Kingdom becomes more than our theology—it becomes our ultimate reality, more real to us than our present lives.

If we’re going to have real joy in our lives now, we must catch the vision of our lives *then*, in the coming Kingdom of God, when we will receive even greater joy from working with people and changing their lives, watching them become successful in every way. That will be job satisfaction to the extreme, and it should become so real to us that we live for the coming Kingdom of God. It should be our reason for living—not a peripheral goal, but an overriding goal.

Joy in What Is Eternal

Speaking to the Corinthian brethren—who, like you and me, had many difficulties in their lives—the Apostle Paul addressed a fundamental truth:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

The aging process is largely a *dying* process—that’s simply the way organized energy works, according to the laws of physics. Yet, inwardly, we are being made new every day as we gain insight and deeper understanding. As we see new ways to grow and pursue that growth, we’re brought closer to the mind of God—made new.

We might be tempted to object to Paul calling our troubles a “light affliction.” To us, they can feel very heavy! But they are all *temporary*, because this very life in the flesh is temporary.

And whatever is temporary is not truly long-term—not in the face of eternity. We can see the temporary with our physical eyes and can easily become focused on our jobs, our homes, and whatever the world offers us. But those will not last. When we focus on the eternal things, those we can now only see in our mind’s eye, we open ourselves up to true joy, because we know that what we see is permanent satisfaction and fulfillment.

This life is merely training for our next responsibility as members of the Kingdom of God—to teach others God’s way of life, watching them succeed in their families and develop their bright futures. And as we find joy in this life, even when our circumstances are painful, we show God that we believe Him—not just believe He exists, but believe what He *says*. There is a big difference between believing *in* God and believing God: “Even the demons believe—and tremble” (James 2:19).

We must believe that, if we endure to the end, God *will* give us eternal life—and not only eternal life, but eternal energy, health, and happiness. Christ said, “Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you” (John 16:22). Christ knew that there would be great sadness at His death, so He assured His disciples, *When I see you again, you are going to express intense joy. You are going to be excited. You are going to realize how real all of this is.* And of course, that realization

propelled their lives from there on, interacting with the resurrected reality of Christ.

Jesus said that no one could take away the joy He would give His disciples, and the same is true for us; if we are focused on Him, no one will be able to ruin our joy, our ability to see the big picture of what God has offered us. This gives us the true joy that is a fruit of God’s Spirit, and God is entirely willing to provide that fruit. None of Satan’s tactics can take it from us unless we allow them to do so.

Joy in Our Potential

The Apostle Peter gives us a good overview:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:6–9).

To rejoice is to *express* joy—joy that manifests in our lives, in our attitudes and demeanors. We all have trials as we live in Satan’s world, because we’re being trained to reject that world and develop a faith that has been purged of all impurities. God will reveal the full extent of what He is developing in each of us when we are glorified as His sons and daughters at Christ’s return.

Physical gold is very pretty, but most of its value comes from what we human beings attach to it. The character we are building, the spiritual gold, has tremendous *inherent* value, so it truly puts physical gold to shame. Physical gold is purified by fire, driving off its impurities—but spiritual gold is purified when we make right decisions, even in difficult circumstances, and cast out our own wrong thinking.

Though none of us have ever seen Christ visually, we’ve experienced His presence in our lives, which gives us tremendous hope for the future. The world can’t understand this hope right now, nor the joy that comes from it, but we can be assured that it will understand one day—because God keeps His word. He has offered us the blessings of sonship in His family and of eternal life—eternal *joy*—and we can have rock-solid confidence in the reality of His invincible plan.

If we endure to the end, we are guaranteed that Christ will complete His work in us and bring us into God’s own family (Philippians 1:6). We can all develop great joy in our lives if we keep our minds focused on the incredible potential that God has offered to every single one of us. (LN)



Prepare for Rulership

By **J. Charles Ogwyn**

God has a magnificent plan, and He reveals it to mankind through His Holy Days. We understand that He has called us for a very special purpose—that we are in training right now to rule with Jesus Christ at His return. Everything that we go through is to prepare us for what comes next. God has chosen each of us individually and is actively working with us to prepare us for our specific role in the next step in His master plan.

If you have trouble relating to the idea that you will someday be a ruler, you're in good company. Moses, too, had doubt and apprehension about the assignment God had for him, but God gave him everything he needed to be successful in that role (Exodus 3:11–12). So, how can we be qualified for rulership? We have been called to become kings and priests, but what qualities and characteristics does God require in us as we prepare to fulfill that future responsibility? What does God look for in a king?

A Tale of Two Rulers

King David represents the “gold standard” among the kings of Israel—the one against whom all the others are compared. When we are told about those known as righteous kings, we read that they walked in the way of their ancestor David and served the Lord (e.g., 2 Kings 22:1–2). Those who did wickedly were described as not having measured up to David, not having lived as he lived (e.g., 1 Kings 15:1–3).

But we know David was not the first king of Israel. When the Israelites demanded that Samuel establish a monarchy (1 Samuel 8:19–20), God gave them what they wanted—an impressive-looking king. We're told of Saul, “There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people” (1 Samuel 9:2). Saul looked impressive. In fact, when he was introduced to the Israelites as their king, Samuel called attention to this fact, saying about Saul that “there is no one like him among all the people” (1 Samuel 10:24).

But Saul wasn't king for very long before he became unsuitable. In 1 Samuel 13, we read of how he foolishly offered a burnt offering himself, instead of waiting on God's minister.

Consequently, Saul's house would not continue as royalty. In 1 Samuel 15, we learn of Saul's approach to following God's instructions and the ensuing confrontation with Samuel. Saul was greatly concerned with appearances: When he was corrected for ignoring God's instructions, his primary concern was the people's approval. “I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel” (1 Samuel 15:30).

God chose David to replace Saul, but it would be several years before David's reign would begin. The first king over Israel was chosen based on the people's criteria; they wanted to be just like the nations around, and the warnings Samuel delivered from God fell on deaf ears. The next king was chosen based on entirely different criteria. Scripture gives us insight into why Saul was rejected as king and David was selected: “The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:14).

God sent Samuel to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the next king, giving us further insight into how God selects people for different roles. Jesse introduced his sons to Samuel, beginning with the firstborn. “So it was, when they came, that he [Samuel] looked at Eliab and said, ‘Surely the LORD's anointed is before Him!’ But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’” (1 Samuel 16:6–7).

God calls attention here to the difference between the way people judge and the way He judges. Although Eliab looked impressive, God was looking for someone after His own heart who would do all His will (Acts 13:22). Let's note some of the character traits and patterns of behavior that ultimately qualified David to serve as king over Israel.

Faithfulness

We're told that King Saul did not faithfully follow God's instructions, but that his replacement would strive to do God's will. Faithfulness is a character trait that is evident in the little things. Christ tells us, “He who is faithful in what is least

is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10).

Our character is not just the way we act when all eyes are on us; it is evident in our choices and behavior that no one else can see. We see this in David’s approach when his job was to shepherd his family’s flock of sheep. The shepherd’s job is to provide and care for the flock and keep it safe from harm. The job requires consistent care and attention to detail, regardless of the shepherd’s personal comfort.

We read that when David was a shepherd, “when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth” (1 Samuel 17:34–35). Instead of abdicating his responsibility out of concern for his own personal safety, David demonstrated that he was faithful even in dangerous situations when no one was around. He could have made excuses about how the lamb was lost and he couldn’t stop it, but he didn’t. David took his responsibility very seriously, and he conscientiously and faithfully cared for what had been entrusted to him, even when it involved great personal risk.

Trust in God

As the patterns that govern our lives, habits require effort; they are built one day at a time. Once established, they become automatic and don’t require deliberation. That is why it is so important to build the habit of looking to God and trusting in Him for the small things. That becomes our pattern—our automatic response to whatever situation we face. Our actions in the heat of the moment are in large part governed by our habits.

David built the habit of looking to and trusting in God. We see this in his response to being confronted by a lion and a bear. As the predator responded to David’s effort to retrieve a lamb, “when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear” (1 Samuel 17:35–36).

David’s actions appear extremely bold and dramatic—and they are—but fundamentally they represent the actions of someone who deeply trusted in God and understood the source of safety. “The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (v. 37). David understood that safety is ultimately from God, and that if God is on our side the size of an obstacle is irrelevant—deeply trusting in God meant that he didn’t need to be afraid of the lion, the bear, or even Goliath. “In God We Trust” was a way of life for David, not just a nice-sounding phrase printed on currency.

Time Spent with God

This complete trust in God is not something we can work up by ourselves—it is the result of a relationship with God, and a

good, close relationship is founded on quality time spent together. David spent time in building a lasting relationship that not only defined his life as a young man, but will ultimately define him for all eternity (Ephesians 5:15–16; Jeremiah 30:9).

At different stages of life, we face different distractions, and today we find many. However, David’s wise son noted that “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). The particular nature of the distractions available to mankind has changed over the last 6,000 years, but our fundamental choice remains the same—is time spent with God a priority in our lives or not?

We have an advantage that wasn’t available to David: access to the entirety of God’s word. Many of us have several printed copies of the complete Bible in our homes, but before the printing press, Scripture had to be copied by hand—to own a copy was a great luxury that was out of reach for all but the wealthiest. Not only that, but during David’s lifetime the only books of the Bible that existed were the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, and Job. Think about how much we can understand about God, His plan, and how He has worked with His chosen people through what is recorded in the other books of the Bible.

David didn’t have the complete Bible that we have today, but what he did have was a deep love for God. As a result, he wrote, “Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97). A deep love for God is more than mere words spoken in prayer or in conversation with others. Real love for God is demonstrated in our private thoughts and actions. Jesus Christ told His disciples, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Loving God influences our thinking, which in turn directs our actions—it means loving His way of life, what it produces, and where it leads. In fact, loving God *is* a way of life.

Zeal

The opposite of zeal is half-hearted indifference, and when we consider that, we quickly see why zeal is required if we are to please God. Saul did not have a zeal for carrying out God’s instructions—and when things became uncomfortable he chose to cut his obedience short.

David, by contrast, was a man of great passion. His enthusiasm for God was obvious, and it showed throughout his life in different ways. His zeal for God led him to dance before the ark “with all his might” (2 Samuel 6:14). It led him to memorialize in songs God’s intervention and care for His people. It led him to dream of building a house for God and to write that “zeal for Your house has eaten me up” (Psalm 69:9).

Throughout David’s life, his passion for God was apparent. In fact, when God told him that he would not be allowed to build God a house, David wasn’t content to just move on. This was one of the great disappointments of David’s life, and

we can learn much from his response. He yearned to do as much as God would allow him to—so, though Solomon constructed the temple, David prepared its drawings and gathered some of its materials (1 Chronicles 28:11–19).

Humility

David received an interesting opportunity after Samuel anointed him. We read about it in 1 Samuel 16:19, finding that King Saul gave instructions for David to be brought before him. David, the one anointed to replace Saul as king, was given a job working directly for Saul as his armorbearer. When Saul was troubled, David's job was to play soothing music, at which Saul recovered. This was a great change for David—he went from being a shepherd watching over his father's flock to holding an important position in the king's court, working directly with Saul. During this time, David received quite the education, seeing from a unique vantage point how the government functioned. Imagine all that he would have witnessed and observed in that situation, so close to the king.

On occasion, David would return home and resume shepherding duties (1 Samuel 17:15). These were two very different stations in life—working in a royal environment, in the presence of the king of Israel, and tending his father's sheep. One was outwardly impressive; the other was not. But instead of shunning the humble job of a shepherd in favor of his new glamorous position, David returned to shepherding when he was on leave from Saul.

David could have returned home solely to impress his friends and neighbors with stories about his important work with the king. He could have used his new duties as an excuse to leave the “lesser” task of shepherding up to someone else, but he didn't. He humbly moved back and forth between these two very different positions, not letting his job with the king inflate his view of himself.

Our self-worth should not come from any of the passing things of this world. Rather, it should come from understanding that we are made in the image of God and called to be a part of His family for eternity. Real humility is a way of thinking that is reflected in our actions, and David's humility showed in his actions throughout the course of his life.

Response to Correction

When Saul was corrected, his response was not rooted in humility. In fact, Samuel reminded him of an earlier time, saying that God had selected Saul as Israel's king when he had been “little in your own eyes” (1 Samuel 15:17). Saul denied wrongdoing and made excuses for not carrying out God's instructions as given. He heard the correction, but he didn't take it to heart. As a result, God selected David to be Saul's replacement. These two kings exhibited very different responses when corrected.

David was a righteous king, but he also made some terrible mistakes that are recorded for our education. For example, we have the account of the census and its consequences: “Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel. So David said to Joab and to the leaders of the people, ‘Go, number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number of them to me that I may know it’” (1 Chronicles 21:1–2). David's counselors advised against going through with this, but David didn't heed their advice, and the census was taken.

Sin brings consequences that can both cause pain in the moment and have long-lasting effects. “And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He struck Israel. So David said to God, ‘I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now, I pray, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly’” (1 Chronicles 21:7–8). David didn't make excuses, try to justify himself, or blame others—he acknowledged his mistake and asked God for forgiveness and mercy.

Mistakes are a part of life—we all fall short for a variety of reasons. The most significant issue that arises from a mistake is what we will do about it. Is our response one of humility, repentance, and eagerness to change, or is it like that of King Saul? The consequences of a sin may last a lifetime, but the consequences of what we do about our sin can last for eternity!

An Awesome Future

The stories of the men and women God used throughout history are preserved so we can learn from them. Through God's word, we learn about the results of the choices His people have made. Through their mistakes, we see our own humanity, and through their triumphs, we receive encouragement and inspiration. David's life contains many lessons for all of us.

Especially in these troubled times, we recognize that the world we live in is passing away. The ills that we see—the wars, injustice, crime, poverty, sickness, corruption, loneliness, drug and alcohol abuse, suffering, pollution, and environmental disasters—are the natural consequences of civilizations built apart from God. However, we understand that God will intervene. Soon, a new reality will exist on the earth, and we will have the absolutely astounding opportunity to help establish God's government and rule with Jesus Christ!

Rulers in God's government will have a very different approach from that which mankind has used throughout the past 6,000 years. We are currently learning, developing, and practicing the character traits that are foundational to leadership in the administration of His government. What an awesome future we can look forward to! (LN)

Conscientious Objector Status in the United States

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

If you are a young person in the Church and living in the United States, there is new information that you may need to know. The 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, to be implemented by the end of this year, will ensure that young men aged 18 to 26 will *automatically* be registered for the draft. The registration will include all eligible male citizens, as well as noncitizens, such as those who hold Permanent Resident cards, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. Those traveling with nonimmigrant visas are excluded from registration.

The system will use federal databases to automatically register only young men, although there have been legislative proposals to also register young women. Registration itself does not violate biblical principles and does not imply consent to participate in war. In fact, registration can provide young Church members the opportunity to formally state their conscientious objection to military service.

The world seems to be preparing for war. The U.S. is increasing its military budget substantially and is exerting pressure on its NATO allies to do the same. Conflicts continue to rage in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere. In Asia, the U.S. is preparing for the possibility of a major conflict with China. In Myanmar, young men in the Church have had to flee their villages to avoid being inducted into the military. Even if you are not a U.S. resident, you should be aware of your draft status in your country of residence.

For now, the U.S. has an all-volunteer military, but the possibility of an active military draft being reinstituted has caused concern among many in the Living Church of God. They include those who are eligible for the draft, as well as parents who are concerned that their sons and even their daughters could be drafted into the military.

Filing for Conscientious Objector Status

Church Administration and Legal Affairs have information available for (1) those who are draft-eligible and establishing their Conscientious Objector (CO) status, (2) those previously discharged or retired from the military and interested in establishing their CO status, and (3) adherents currently in the military (active, reserves, or National Guard) who have personally come to conscientiously object to military service and wish to be discharged. Both men and women may file for CO status.

Those applying for CO status should be aware that the application will be reviewed carefully by federal authorities before CO status is granted, so applicants need to be aware of the government's criteria. The Selective Service Board is

charged with determining a person's genuine sincerity of belief. While not comprehensive, the following are some examples of what a federal reviewer might want to know:

- Does the applicant know the Church's beliefs and literature?
- Does the applicant regularly attend Church services and activities?
- Does the applicant know the Bible's answers to questions regarding war and fighting?
- Can the applicant describe how his beliefs about war developed and what influenced them?
- Does the applicant own a gun or participate in games that simulate warfare?
- Does the applicant object to all wars or just a particular one?

You may wish to research the subject personally with the help of Church resources and your pastor or to seek advice from qualified professionals. You may also want to examine the Selective Service website at [SSS.gov](https://www.sss.gov) for further information concerning what will happen if the United States government reestablishes the draft.

Those eligible for the U.S. military draft among the Living Church of God membership who wish the Church's assistance in establishing their CO status should contact Legal Affairs at CO@LCG.org to request the Church's CO packet containing information on establishing CO status. Those adherents who return a completed copy of their CO form to Legal Affairs will be added to the Church's official Registry of Conscientious Objectors—and a copy will be forwarded to the Center on Conscience and War for inclusion in its national database of Conscientious Objectors.

Many countries make provisions to allow sincere conscientious objectors to be excluded from mandatory military service or to be placed in nonmilitary roles of public service to fulfill a national service commitment. In such situations, Church adherents in many countries may be able to serve without violating God's law. We recommend that those subject to compulsory military service investigate the relevant laws in their respective countries.

If you are seeking CO status, it is advisable to file well in advance of a compulsory service order. Conscientious objectors should prayerfully think through their beliefs now and be on record for their claim. The best documentation for CO status is living by our convictions now—so that when a draft is instituted no one can accuse us of acting from cowardice or convenience rather than from deeply held convictions. (LN)



What God Thinks About Body Ink

By **Scott D. Winnail**

One summer, I had the privilege of taking a trip on which I spent time in four nations. As modern travel dictates, I also spent hours in the airports of these nations, seeing people come and go from across the globe. It was July—one of the warmest months in much of the Northern Hemisphere, and two of these airports were in Florida and the Caribbean. During this trip in particular, I was struck by the abundance of “body art” on display—from teenagers to grandparents, the sheer number of bodies covered by multiple tattoos was astonishing. If I knew no better, I would have felt left out! Overall, though, I was sobered by what I saw.

Tattoos have existed for thousands of years, and are referenced in histories around the globe. They have been used as decorations, brands of identification during times of enslavement and imprisonment, signs of social status or accomplishment, and symbols of individuality and personal freedom. The 21st century has seen a global resurgence of tattooing, but tattoos have been long-present—especially in some segments of society such as the military, gangs, and organized crime groups. We now see the emergence of so-called “Christian tattooing”—an attempt to justify tattooing by using what are considered “Christian images.” Today, tattoos are also made more popular by reality television shows featuring tattoo parlors.

Considering the increasing popularity, improvements in design intricacy, and widespread availability, we should consider what our Creator thinks about body ink. What does Scripture tell us?

Graffiti on the Holy

In Leviticus 19:28, God gave the following command to the people He intended to be His model nation: “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the LORD.” Virtually all translators agree that the Hebrew words describing the process in Leviticus 19:28 can only accurately be translated in this way: “tattoo.” Sadly, many professing Christians today dismiss this command as being from the “old covenant” and thus “nailed to

the cross.” Many others do not even know that this verse exists! However, taken in the context of the entire Bible, why would God make such a statement—one that He never rescinded in the New Testament?

God created our bodies “fearfully and wonderfully,” as wise King David observed (Psalm 139:14). We are formed according to the appearance of the Creator Himself (Genesis 1:26). But understanding God’s perspective on tattoos requires that we recognize the true purpose for the human body.

At first, in ancient Israel, God dwelt *among* His people through a pillar of cloud and fire. However, once the physical tabernacle and then the temple were built, the Holy of Holies within was the only place on earth where God consistently resided. At the death of Christ, the heavy curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple was torn in half (Matthew 27:51), symbolizing the reality that God no longer chose to exist separated from mankind—He intended instead to reside with and *within* mankind through the Holy Spirit.

On the Day of Pentecost in AD 31, when the Holy Spirit was poured out and made available to all whom God would choose to call (Acts 2:1–39), God showed that the body of a true Christian is the “temple” in which He, through His Spirit, dwells. The Apostle Paul warned of the serious consequences that would befall those who defile this temple. “If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are” (1 Corinthians 3:16–17). And just as the collective “body”—the Church—is holy to God, so too are the individual bodies of those who are part of His Church!

In that same letter to the Corinthians, Paul also taught that “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [which] is in you, [which] you have from God, *and you are not your own*” (1 Corinthians 6:19). God made our bodies. He blessed us with them, and, after we are baptized, He lives in them through His Spirit. He has every right to dictate how we treat and take care of the bodies He gave to us—the very bodies He desires to place His Spirit within.

Keeping this in mind, then, tattoos are a type of *graffiti* that mars the exterior of God’s Holy Temple. If God’s phys-

ical temple still stood in Jerusalem today, none of us would consider using a chisel or can of spray paint to etch our name or an image into its hallowed walls. Likewise, we need also to respect the condition of the body as God's temple on earth today. Even aside from the many health risks, which are very real, is it any wonder that God forbade tattoos?

A New Way of Life

One of the incredible blessings of God's calling is that He allows us to repent when we sin. Baptism is the ultimate experience of forgiveness, allowing our past, repented-of sins to be washed away. Christians who obtained tattoos prior to their conversion were completely forgiven of this when they were baptized.

What about the brethren who have no tattoos, but who sometimes become uncomfortable seeing tattoos on their brethren at services? We must remember that conversion is a process whereby God calls sinners—not perfect people—to repentance. He calls sinners to cease from their sins and “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). Although tattoos are essentially a permanent reminder of past sins, we must remember that when people truly repent and turn from their worldly ways, God has not only forgiven them; He has also blotted out their past sins and not brought them to remembrance (Psalm 51:1–2)—despite the permanent “outward” reminder that may remain. A true Christian must never hold the past against his brother or sister in Christ, but instead bestow the outgoing love of Christ toward them (John 13:35). “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Matthew 7:1–2).

Certainly, repentant Christians bearing tattoos should no longer feel guilty for their past transgressions. But neither should they proudly display their tattoos to show them off as a mark of God's forgiveness. The Apostle Paul commented that although it is not a sin to eat meat previously offered to false gods, he would personally be willing to never eat meat at all in front of those of his brethren who would be offended by it (1 Corinthians 8:9–13). The point is that we must avoid placing a “stumbling block” before other brethren.

When I was a boy, there was one minister in the Church who always wore a long-sleeved shirt and long sweatpants when playing basketball, and I wondered why, since it looked like he would be very hot as he played. I used to go to the locker room with my father and the other players after the ball games—which made me feel all grown up—and when I saw this minister remove his clothes to shower, I saw that his body was covered with tattoos. He had been in the military before his conversion, and God allowed him to repent and even to be placed into the ministry. Although he knew he had been forgiven, this minister worked hard to avoid putting a

stumbling block before others. That example of love for the brethren sticks in my mind all these years later.

We all have sins in our past. Many sins leave non-physical “scars” that cannot be removed surgically—consequences that must be lived with. Similarly, many brethren with tattoos will find that surgical removal is not an option, whether because of the high cost, the lack of availability, or the pain and side effects involved.

There is no biblical command to cover every inch of tattooed flesh, but those bearing tattoos may want to consider covering as much of their tattooed flesh as they *practically* can when in public settings, out of love for the brethren. Although a converted Church member can view tattoos on another converted person in light of God's power to forgive, there remains the risk that some observers could mistake tattoos on a member as license to “sin and then repent.” As ambassadors for Christ and His way of life (2 Corinthians 5:20), we do not want to set an example that could confuse the young and impressionable or mistakenly communicate an “endorsement” of tattoos.

As we move closer to the end of the age, increasing numbers of individuals will be called into the Church from various backgrounds. We will see more people begin attending Sabbath services with tattoos, body piercings, and other visible results of sin. Although those being called will need to learn to repent of past sins, and even at times literally cover up the results, those of us in the body—whose sins are often less visible—will also need to be loving, forgiving, patient, kind, and gentle (1 Corinthians 13:4–8; Galatians 5:22–23). Jesus Christ made a very powerful observation on the night before His crucifixion: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). As Christ is willing to forgive any of *our* past sins as long as we genuinely repent, we must do the same for others He calls, regardless of their past mistakes.

Those who come into God's Church tattooed are no less brethren than those who come into the Church with no ink on their flesh. Indeed, a repentant tattooed member may be far more deeply converted than a self-righteous and judgmental person who recoils at the tattooed. Even so, repentant brethren with tattoos understand that they must try not to send a wrong message.

Conversely, if we see tattoos on our brothers or sisters in Christ, we should remember that it is not our place to condemn those whom God has forgiven. Their bodies may be scarred with regretted tattoos, but we must be sure that our attitudes toward them are not marred by self-righteousness. Rather, with or without tattoos, we must be sure always to present ourselves to one another in humility, displaying true godly love for each other. *This* is what God thinks about body ink. (LH)



Are You a Peacemaker?

By **Douglas S. Winnail**

Do you understand the Gospel of Peace? Today we live in a world of violence, terrorism, and wars threatening to engulf entire regions. On the smaller scale, families are torn apart by divorce, political differences, and shifting moral values. Scripture indicates that during the last days of this age “lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12).

However, there is “good news” beyond the present strife! Jesus Christ said that He would return to set up the Kingdom of God and reward His disciples with the opportunity to reign on the earth under His direction (Revelation 5:10). He and the saints will soon establish a world-ruling government in Jerusalem, which will bring peace to the entire planet (Isaiah 9:6–7). Nations will be *taught* the way to peace. “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, *neither shall they learn war anymore*” (Isaiah 2:2–4).

These are not just pleasant platitudes; they are prophecies of what will happen when Jesus Christ returns to the earth in the years just ahead. Our job in the Kingdom of God will be to bring peace to this world and to show all of mankind the way to peace. This is what the “gospel of peace” is about (Ephesians 6:15). This is why Jesus told His disciples, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). This is our future—if we learn the way that leads to peace.

If we hope to be part of the government of God and to help bring peace to this strife-torn planet, we need to ask ourselves some very important questions: *Am I a peacemaker? Am I growing in that capacity? How good am I at “calming troubled waters”? Am I able to “smooth ruffled feathers” when people around me become upset? Or do my words and deeds stir things up even more, like pouring gasoline on smoldering embers?*

Watching world events, it is obvious that the leaders of this world have not been able to achieve the peace that nearly everyone desires. But do we know how to become peacemakers? Do we recognize the skills that are needed to promote

peaceful relationships? Can we identify the principles from Scripture that can help us become effective peacemakers—among our families and friends today and for the whole world in the Kingdom of God? Although many may say they want peace, only a very few understand what the Bible reveals about the way to *real* peace.

The Missing Key

In the last century, feuding governments fought two World Wars and countless minor wars in the hope of establishing peace. The twentieth century also saw the establishment of two transnational organizations—the League of Nations and the United Nations—which were created in the hope of bringing peace to this earth. But all those efforts failed to eliminate war and did not bring lasting peace.

The Bible foretold this failure long ago. The Old Testament prophets looked ahead to the end of the age and foresaw a time when misguided leaders would be talking about peace, negotiating for peace, and praying for peace, “saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11). The prophet Isaiah wrote of a time when the “ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly” upon realizing that all their efforts have failed (Isaiah 33:7). In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul prophesied, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money... disobedient to parents... unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, traitors... headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1–4). Prophecy shows us that the days just ahead of us will grow worse, not better—and for specific reasons.

The Bible reveals *why* all the efforts of brilliant and well-meaning people have been unable to establish lasting peace between individuals—or nations. The prophet Isaiah explains, “*The way of peace they have not known*, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace” (Isaiah 59:8). This is the sad lesson of history.

The Colt 45 revolver, called the Peacemaker, never brought lasting peace to the American West. Neville Chamberlain promised “peace in our time” to the British people, but World War II followed soon afterward. The policy of

“peace through strength” saw the United States and the Soviet Union stockpiling nuclear weapons and pursuing “mutually assured destruction”—which brought terror, not real peace, to millions of citizens of the rival superpowers. Countless “peace plans” for the Middle East have been offered, but no amount of shuttle diplomacy and dialogue has been able to settle the region’s age-old religious and political disputes. Nations have built more prisons and hired more police, but this has not ended interpersonal violence. In every sphere of life, the best human efforts to establish peace between individuals, or between nations, have simply not worked.

However, God reveals in the Bible a *fundamental* key about the way to lasting peace. Long ago, David wrote, “*Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble*” (Psalm 119:165). David understood powerful and practical principles in Scripture that point the way to real peace. He wrote, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). David urged his readers to “depart from evil, and do good; *seek peace and pursue it*” (Psalm 34:14).

Seeing David’s perspective, it should be no surprise that he will reign under Christ as king over the twelve tribes of Israel in the coming Kingdom of God (Jeremiah 30:9; Hosea 3:5). But what are some of the peacemaking principles known to David—and to others, schooled in the way of peace, who have developed the skills that God reveals in Scripture?

The Path to Peace

When God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, He pointed them toward the path that leads to peace. “If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments... I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid... and the sword will not go through your land” (Leviticus 26:3–6). Moses’ words show how obeying God’s law will lead to peace. If we want to be peacemakers, we must follow God’s instructions—in every area of our lives.

Solomon wrote down many practical principles that promote peace and reduce the risk of conflict. He explained that contention is often the result of pride. This means that if we can recognize and eliminate pride, arguments and quarrels will cease (Proverbs 13:10). The Proverbs teach us that harsh words (such as calling someone names or leveling accusations) stir up hatred, but “a soft [kindly, diplomatic] answer turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1). They explain that peacemakers do not spread gossip or rumors or say derogatory things about others (Proverbs 16:27–28). Instead, they strive to remain calm and objective and are “slow to anger” (Proverbs 16:32). Peacemakers overlook and forgive insults and attempt to avoid arguments—or stop them before they start (Proverbs 17:9, 14)—because they understand that only “a fool” starts arguments and spreads rumors (Proverbs 18:6–8).

Solomon also understood that jumping to conclusions before hearing from both sides in a conflict will not bring peace; it will only aggravate problems (Proverbs 18:13, 17). He also recognized that constantly harping on an issue is irritating and undermines peaceful relationships (Proverbs 27:15–16). Solomon understood that angry people—who are often proud, as well as angry—tend to stir up strife involving other people (Proverbs 29:22–23). This is one reason for the common advice to “count to ten” (or 20 or 100!) before responding to someone when emotions are high. Peacemakers *understand* and *use* these principles.

In the New Testament, we see how Jesus Christ and His apostles also emphasized peace-promoting principles. Jesus advised His disciples to go the extra mile in forgiving those who irritate them (Matthew 5:38–48; 6:12–15). He also warned His disciples not to sit in judgment of others, but instead to focus on putting their own lives in order (Matthew 7:1–5). Jesus explained that when you have disputes with your brothers or sisters, you should *go to them first* and humbly attempt to straighten out the situation, instead of telling others about the problem (Matthew 18:15–20). Jesus also pointed out that self-seeking—trying to get ahead of others—is a source of strife and is not conducive to peaceful interpersonal relationships (Matthew 20:20–28).

The Apostle Paul encouraged Christians to be patient, to avoid showing favoritism, and to give up the desire to “get even” with others: “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18–21; see also Hebrews 12:14). James urges us, as disciples of Christ, to be careful how we use our tongues. We are to avoid boasting and bitterness. We should be humble, approachable, and willing to listen, and we should avoid partiality (James 3:1–18).

The qualities listed in Scripture as promoting peace are fruits of the Holy Spirit, which we must strive to develop. Paul explains that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). At baptism, we repented of our old ways and made a commitment to walk in Jesus Christ’s footsteps and obey His instructions. As we grow, we must continue to work diligently to exercise the fruits of the Spirit—and in doing so to develop the peacemaking skills outlined in Scripture. This requires effort on our part, continual practice, and the willingness to be guided by God’s Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ will soon return to the earth as Prince of Peace to establish the Kingdom of God. We have been called to reign with Him, and to do that, we must become peacemakers. If we make that a goal and a priority in the days, months, and years ahead, we will be all the more ready to receive the reward Jesus Christ will bring when He returns to establish peace on earth! (LN)

The Beautiful and the Good

By Wallace G. Smith

The following has been adapted from material available at LivingYouth.org, which strives to address issues relevant to the teenagers and young adults of God's Church today.

Many years ago, the first time I heard Philippians 4:8 focused upon in a sermon, I felt a twinge of discomfort. “Finally, brethren,” it reads, “whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

It's a positive and uplifting verse, to be sure, and portions of it resonated with me. However, I recognized that I had certain interests—things I enjoyed “meditating on,” if you will—that probably didn't fit such descriptions. Not that they were *obviously* terrible or filled with evil. But still, I felt a *draw* to

In an odd way, in this messed-up world, there is often an allure to ugly things—**things lacking proper virtue and not really of good report.**

some things—certain forms of entertainment, for example—that I would need to spend less time with in order to abide by Philippians 4:8.

In an odd way, in this messed-up world, there is often an allure to ugly things—things lacking proper virtue and not really of good report. I could think of stories with heroes who were really “antiheroes”—not only lacking admirable qualities but also possessing some frankly evil ones. I had to admit that it was the negative qualities that made the characters interesting or exciting. It would be one thing if the attraction were based on the opportunity to see a character overcome those qualities and become a better person, but that wasn't it. The evil qualities were part and parcel of the “hero's” real appeal.

Human nature wants to find an appealing quality to darkness, to the “bad guy”—and, yes, to wickedness and evil. Even if we don't want the objects of our mental affection—songs, stories, art, what have you—to be utterly evil or dark, we too often enjoy the “flavor” added by the darker elements they possess. Were we all that God wants us to be, it would not be so. But this world trains us to want things we should not.

The Better Path

As I matured over the years, I began to see the wisdom of Philippians 4:8. The more time I spent seeking to apply the Apostle Paul's advice, the more I began to recognize when something lacked such darker characteristics and more fully embodied the elements of virtue, purity, and praiseworthiness. To be sure, I had a lot of work to do. It's not an easy task to train your mind to begin moving in different directions—recognizing that one path is more beneficial and ultimately more enjoyable than another is not the same thing as training our feet and legs to walk that newer path. But recognizing is a start. And as we follow Paul's admonition and work to meditate on those things in our mind—the things that are noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy—we begin to devote ourselves more fully to them in all areas of our life.

One morning, not very long ago, I woke up earlier than usual. It was still dark outside and, seeing how I was not going back to sleep, I decided to go ahead and get up. A little later, sitting in the living room, I noticed that dawn was

creeping over the horizon, so I decided to take my coffee outside to go look at it for a while. Some neurologists say that getting the light of dawn into our eyes is beneficial to the human brain, so I thought it would be nice to take advantage of the opportunity to do so.

And as I stood there, looking over my neighbor's misty field across the street, soaking in the orange sky mingling with the blue above as the sun continued to make its presence known ahead of its arrival to begin the day, I thought to myself that I was thankful to God for the beautiful things. Because the scene truly was beautiful: the mixture of hues, silhouettes, and a touch of haze on the ground with a clear and brightening sky above. It reminded me that there are beautiful things in my life—and that God wants me to spend time meditating on them, not on the ugly things. In fact, the longer I looked at the horizon, the more I thought that wasting time on the ugly things leaves less time for the truly beautiful. And as I continued to enjoy the scene in front of me, I thought, *What a bad trade it is to spend precious time meditating on the ugly and unworthy, taking time away that could be spent instead on the truly beautiful and good.*

So, let us work to take Paul's advice seriously. Our Father in Heaven longs to give us an eternal existence completely and utterly filled with the noble, the just, the pure, the lovely, the good, the virtuous, and the praiseworthy—the *beautiful*. And every moment spent meditating on those things is an opportunity to taste that future. (LN)

FOMO

By Joseph Bernard

We live in a world that is constantly telling us we are missing out on the best life has to offer. Whether it's a limited-time sale, a short theatrical run of a movie, or even a chicken sandwich promoted with "get it while it lasts," the message is the same: We must get what we feel we need *now*—or risk missing out forever. This feeling has a name: FOMO or the *fear of missing out*. For God's people, it is vital to understand FOMO and its true origin so that we can not only avoid this fear, but be reassured that God will not let us miss out on a fulfilling existence now and in the future.

FOMO can be "defined as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent," and "characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing" ("Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out," *Computers in Human Behavior*, Volume 29, Issue 4). While studies on FOMO associate it with social media, it extends far deeper into our general life experiences, creating a relentless loop: We see something that looks good, we wonder why we don't have it, and we measure ourselves by whether we can obtain it.

Although the term itself was coined relatively recently, the concept of FOMO traces back to the very beginning of human history. In Genesis 3:4–6, we see Adam and Eve gripped by the fear that they were missing out on something God was holding back from them. Note what Satan used to draw them in: He promised they would be "like God, knowing good and evil."

Their decision to eat the fruit was rooted in a fear of not having everything they *could* have. In that moment, they felt apprehension, doubt, and even betrayal. They acted on the fear of missing out on a perceived benefit, reinforcing the selfish nature that lies at the heart of FOMO.

This idea can be traced even further back—to the fall of Lucifer. Isaiah 14:13–14 describes how Satan wanted to be God, feeling as though he was missing out on power he lacked. Lucifer was created with immense beauty and capability, yet he chose to look past his blessings to see only what he did not have (Ezekiel 28:11–19). His compulsive pursuit of that "missing" power became his downfall.

Why God's People Have Nothing to Fear

Despite a culture—and an adversary—that insists we are lacking, trusting in God allows us to understand that we will never miss out on a truly rewarding life, neither now nor in the future. In Luke 12:32, we are reminded that God is offering us the opportunity to live in His family forever. Verses 22–23 of that chapter remind us that life is about more than just flitting from one experience to the next, chasing whatever we feel we lack at the expense of others and ourselves. We have the opportunity to build meaning that will last for eternity. God is not holding out on us; rather, He is preparing us to experience a life of infinite joy.

It can be easy to feel that we are losing out on meaningful experiences in this present life. A few years ago, I was presented with an opportunity to teach in Japan with the University of Texas system as my sponsor. As an Asian-American with roots in that part of the world, the idea of combining my passions for teaching and learning with travel and cultural immersion was deeply appealing; however, with no congregation in the country, challenging moving logistics, and a society

that would not respect the Sabbath or the Holy Days, I realized I had to walk away from that opportunity.

In the days and weeks that followed, it was indeed a struggle not to let FOMO take root. But Christ's words

provided a great deal of comfort in my decision: "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life" (Luke 18:28–30).

Our Provider, the One who knows us intimately, will provide everything we need in this life and even grant our hearts' desires as they accord with His will. When I turned down that opportunity in Japan, I worried about what I was losing. But instead, I gained a deeper relationship with God, new and lasting friendships—and, eventually, the fulfillment of my desires for travel and other experiences in ways I hadn't expected.

FOMO is an idea built on a lie: the notion that we are constantly lacking and must do whatever we can to fill that hole. This way of thinking began with Satan and was spread to all of mankind. But God's people have a different assurance (Jeremiah 29:11; John 10:10). We do not need to live in a state of apprehension and seeking more. We are promised both a meaningful, abundant life today and a permanent, glorious place in God's eternal family. (L)

Their decision to eat the fruit was rooted in a fear of not having everything they could have. In that moment, they felt apprehension, doubt, and even betrayal. **They acted on the fear of missing out.**



Woman to Woman

“Real Women”

By **Janth B. English**

Recently, a good friend forwarded a link to a social media post that she felt would interest me. I don’t spend a lot of time on social media but, because I respect her opinions, I took a look. The post was by a woman clearly frustrated with trying to fit the mold of what she termed “a Pinterest woman.” She complained that she is expected to do as she is told, be reserved, not display her emotions, and otherwise be unobtrusive. The sense of her post was that, because she felt hopeless in the face of these expectations, she was no longer going to try to meet them.

Upon reflection, I realized that there are probably women in the Church who feel the same way. Her frustration was rooted in the fact that what she was trying to attain was not realistic. Society portrays the ideal woman as a superheroine who directs a corporation, manages a household, rears her children, and maintains a marriage—all in a single bound! This is not reality. And the Barbie-like housewife who is a perfect housekeeper, amazing cook, and master of all things crafty is equally unreal.

So, what qualities define “real women”? What expectations do we have for ourselves as women in the Church of God? Are we unnecessarily frustrated with who we are? Are there godly expectations to which Christian women should aspire? What about the *very* real women of the Bible—how are they portrayed? Let’s examine some of these topics.

Obedience and Reservation

When we think of traits traditionally identified with being female, two that come to mind are kindness and gentleness. While society tends to see these more as feminine qualities, the Scriptures identify them as desirable for both male and female followers of Christ (Galatians 5:22–23). But there are two other characteristics emphasized as desirable for women that often cause them concern—obedience and reservation. These, of course, are admirable character traits, but are they only for women?

God has a lot to say about submission and obedience. He instructs women to submit to their own husbands (Ephesians 5:22), but He also instructs the Church that its members

should submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5). Men and women are to submit to the authorities over them (Romans 13:1), and they are to obey the ministry that Christ has placed over us (Hebrews 13:17). Whether man or woman, married or unmarried, we are all under authority. For all eternity, there will always be someone to whom we give account. Obedience is a key component in the life of a true disciple, and it is a prerequisite to receiving eternal life (Matthew 19:16–17).

It is also true that some husbands may not strive to love their wives in the same way that Christ loves the Church, making it more difficult for a wife to be submissive. If this is your experience, don’t despair; God is aware of your challenges and appreciates your efforts to obey Him. You can pray to Jesus Christ, the Head of every man, and ask Him to help your husband fulfill his responsibilities in a manner that pleases God—and ask Him to help you fulfill your own responsibilities, too, regardless of your husband’s shortcomings.

We can see that obedience and submission are required of both men and women, so women need not feel frustrated and suppressed because we are to obey our husbands. “Real” women—godly women, through God’s Holy Spirit working in them—exercise faith in Jesus Christ to lead their families by deferring to their husbands when there is a difference of opinion.

What about being reserved? Does God want women to be reserved? The answer is *yes* (1 Peter 3:4), but does this mean God expects women to have no thoughts and no opinions—to sit in a corner and say nothing? No! God did not make women intellectually inferior to men in any way. Yes, we are taught to avoid the inappropriate use of that intellect; we are not to teach our congregations (1 Corinthians 14:34), but this restriction is a matter of government and not about capability. To be reserved is to be unpretentious, humble, and modest; it means not being arrogant or showy. Humility is a character trait that God desires to see in all His children, male and female (Isaiah 57:15). In fact, God has promised blessings and salvation to all who have a humble attitude (Psalm 149:4; Proverbs 3:34).

The Scriptures show that arrogance is a symptom of a prideful heart, which God hates, and it will not go unpunished (Proverbs 6:16–17; 16:18). No disciple of Christ, male or female, should desire to be arrogant or showy. Women and men alike should desire to reflect Christ in their demeanor and

to walk humbly with their God (Micah 6:8). This is the true meaning of being reserved, and it is for all who would follow God's way—thus, godly women strive to be reserved.

Not All the Same

So, does God want women to be all the same, like so many yellow pencils? Absolutely not! He has created us to be individuals. Just as we appear different from one another, we each have our own personalities and talents.

People who know me know that I tend to be more analytical and not very creative. Some years ago, a deaconess asked me to help by arranging the flowers for services. I promptly told her the truth—that I didn't know how to do that. She insisted that I could do it, so I gave it a try. When she came back some time later, I hadn't finished, and what I had done looked terrible, to say the least. It felt like her silent stare would never end as she stood there, trying to say something

So, does God want women to be all the same, like so many yellow pencils? Absolutely not! He has created us to be individuals. **Just as we appear different from one another, we each have our own personalities and talents.**

that wouldn't hurt my feelings. She finally stepped over and said, "Let me help you." She remade the arrangement, and it looked beautiful when she had finished.

I tell this story to emphasize that we are not all the same. Should I feel ashamed because I am a mess at all things crafty? No. God has called a diverse range of women with differing strengths and weaknesses. When we examine the Scriptures, we can see the roles that women played and how God used each one's personality and strengths.

Sarah, for example, is shown to be a faithful woman possessing great humility, calling her husband "lord"—or, as we might say now, "sir" (Hebrews 11:11; 1 Peter 3:6). In the book of Judges, we see Deborah, a very brave and wise woman whom God used to judge Israel and lead an army into battle (Judges 4:1–14). Then there is Jael, who acted with bravery and cunning to give Israel total victory over Jabin, King of Canaan, by killing the commander of his army (Judges 4:18–21). Mary, the mother of Jesus, had great inner strength and character to endure the gossip and stigma attached to her being with child before her wedding. She willingly accepted this plight (Luke 1:38).

Most of us know the example of Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus (Luke 10:38–42). Martha was focused on her guests and preoccupied with working to get the food prepared, but she spoke up when she thought her sister should

help. Mary was not inclined to serve in that way—she wanted to sit with the others and learn from Christ at that moment. Two women, both followers of Christ, had two very different personalities, and Jesus did not rebuke Martha until she belittled Mary. There are many other examples that we can study, but we see that there is no "yellow pencil" designation for women. Godly women—"real" women—use the talents God gives them to serve their families and the body of Christ.

Discretion and Wisdom

Perhaps much of the frustration women have stems from expectations we place on ourselves. If we compare ourselves to a fictional depiction of women with no basis in reality, we place ourselves under undue stress. Nor should we compare ourselves to women we feel "have it all together"—the Bible calls this foolish (2 Corinthians 10:12). In the real world, no one has it all together.

God has called us to live freely within the bounds He has set, and His boundaries for women are very clear—put Him first, respect your husband, obey your husband in the Lord, and care for your family. These are not harsh restrictions, and they allow for a variety of personalities, interests, and pursuits. You don't have to try to be someone else.

In a 2014 sermon titled "Who Needs You?" Mr. Rod McNair said he was given this advice as a teenager: "Be yourself, but be a better one." This is good advice. "Real" women will start with who they are and allow God, through His Holy Spirit, to mold and shape them into a more godly version of themselves.

God has called women with differing talents, abilities, and personalities. His goal for all of us is to be a part of His family. He is working with us as individuals and certainly doesn't expect us to all be the same. It's not that we are to be one way or another; each aspect of our character will be used in different situations. Solomon states that there is a time for all things—there is a time to be quietly humble, much like Mary, the mother of Jesus, and there is a time to speak out, as Deborah did. There is a time to be submissive, as exemplified by Sarah, and there is a time to take a firm stand, as Jael did. A godly woman uses discretion and wisdom to know when to display each feature of her character.

Let God's word set your boundaries, and don't impose upon yourself unrealistic constraints that lead to frustration. When you know you need to grow in some area, as we all do, you can ask God to help you make changes by the power of His Holy Spirit. If you ignore all the stereotypical portrayals of women and use the Bible as your mirror, you may find that you're doing better than you think. Don't be frustrated—keep it real. (LN)

Ordinations

Mr. Brent Bailey was ordained a deacon on Pentecost by Pastor Gary Stein and elders David Crockett and Wade Brown. Mr. Bailey serves in the Big Sandy, Texas, congregation.

Mr. Steve Greene was ordained an elder on Pentecost by Pastor Anthony Stroud. Mr. Greene serves in the Montgomery, Alabama, congregation.

Mr. Carl Noering was ordained a deacon on April 18 by Evangelist Stuart Wachowicz and Elder Lenard Hine. Mr. Noering serves in the Edmonton, Camrose, and Red Deer congregations in Alberta, Canada.

Mr. and Mrs. David and Maeve Pérez were ordained deacon and deaconess on Pentecost by evangelists Mario Hernández and Wallace Smith. Mr. and Mrs. Pérez serve in the El Salvador congregation.

Mr. Brady Vanhoozer was ordained a deacon on March 7 by Pastor Lenny Bower. Mr. Vanhoozer serves in the Wytheville, Virginia, congregation.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Jay and Elyse Christensen, of the Brisbane, Queensland, congregation in Australia, are happy to announce the birth of their second child, **Chloe Marie Christensen**. She was born May 2, weighing seven pounds, two ounces, and measuring twenty inches long. She was welcomed home by big brother Jonah, who is overjoyed to have a little sister to shower with love.

Mr. and Mrs. David and Maeve Pérez, of the El Salvador congregation, are filled with gratitude to announce the birth of their second child, **David Pérez**, born on January 9. Big sister Samantha is delighted to welcome her little brother home. As the Pérez family celebrates this new life, they are especially pleased to raise David and Samantha as the fourth generation within the Church of God.

Mr. and Mrs. Lucien and Yolanda Wilson, of the Kingston, Jamaica, congregation, are excited to announce the birth of their son, **Adrian Phillip Wilson**. He was born March 12, weighing six pounds and measuring twenty inches long. They welcome him as their first child.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Jason Dain and **Tasliym Cameron** were united in marriage on the evening of February 23 in San Fernando, Trinidad. The families of the bride and groom and many of the brethren were present at the couple's public avowal of love and respect for each other. After the ceremony, guests enjoyed a tasty meal, and a couple hours of dancing closed the celebration. Mr. and Mrs. Dain attend the Chaguanas, Trinidad, congregation.

Virgil Avery and **Brenda Cronmiller** were united in marriage on Sunday, April 19. Family and friends gathered to celebrate with them. Everyone enjoyed a terrific meal as well as warm fellowship in a picturesque park setting. Mr. and Mrs. Cronmiller attend the St. Louis, Missouri, congregation.

On May 9 the Monroe, Louisiana, congregation acknowledged the 60th wedding anniversary of **Mr. and Mrs. Hermie and Joyce Brown**. A table was set with a beautifully decorated cake, refreshing punch, and a lovely arrangement of cut flowers. Mr. and Mrs. Brown were presented with an exquisite tapestry throw with the words *60 Years Together* and a card signed by all the brethren. Mr. Brown serves as an elder and Mrs. Brown as a deaconess in the congregation. On May 24, the Shreveport congregation honored the Browns with an anniversary cake and a card. Mr. and Mrs. Brown were married on May 13, 1966, and were baptized in 1971.

In Loving Memory

Mr. Michael (Mike) D'Antonio, 88, died on September 18, 2025. As a longtime Church member, baptized in 1965, the Church was his family, and he enjoyed spending time with the brethren. He didn't pass up an opportunity to sing, joining the choir or chorale as opportunity allowed. He was looking forward to celebrating his 60th Feast of Tabernacles, but his heart gave way just before. Mr. D'Antonio was a pillar in the New York City and Queens congregations for many years and will be greatly missed.

Mr. John Fletcher, 67, died on April 1 after a brief illness. Mr. Fletcher was baptized in 1981 and was a member of the Baton Rouge, Louisiana, congregation. He will be greatly missed by his mother—Barbara Fletcher, also a longtime member of the Church of God—as well as a son, a daughter, a brother, two sisters, two grandchildren, and all his Church brethren in Louisiana.

Mr. Dale Fulps, 79, finished his race and died on January 29 with his wife, Darlene, by his side, along with their family. Mr. Fulps lived a very full life in many ways. He was a wonderful husband and father, remembered for his kindness, sense of humor (he loved to laugh), Christian hospitality, love for God and his family, and his love for and service to the brethren. He was baptized in 1980 and was faithful until the end. A member of the Rawlins, Wyoming, congregation, all in the surrounding congregations and areas will certainly miss him, too.

Mr. Emry Garcia, 83, died on April 20. Mr. Garcia attended occasionally with our former association in the 1980s but stopped when he recognized the gross errors being introduced in the teachings. Many years later, he viewed a *Tomorrow's World* telecast and reconnected with the truth, and he was baptized in 2018. Despite facing health challenges, he pushed himself to come to services every week and attend the Feast. He will be missed by his family and the brethren of the Chaguanas, Trinidad, congregation.

Mr. Johnny McKinney, 79, died on January 5. Mr. McKinney dedicated his life to God after being baptized in 1976, and he served as a deacon in the Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Denver, Colorado, congregations. He is remembered for his love for God and his love to laugh and joke with others. He will be greatly missed.

Mr. J. C. Rorie, 89, a longtime member baptized on August 1, 1969, died on May 23 after a lengthy illness. He was ten days short of 90 years old. He was for decades an active member of the Charlotte Spokesman Club, even in his later years. He was beloved in the congregation for his generous spirit—often sharing the abundance of his garden vegetables—and his ready and engaging smile. He is survived by one sister, five children, 16 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren—one son and one grandson are baptized members of the Living Church of God today.

Mr. Rudolph (Rudy) Silvera, 79, died on April 22. Mr. Silvera was baptized in 1980 and loved the Church and the brethren. Over his last few years, his diminishing health sometimes prevented him from attending—however, he pushed himself to be at Sabbath services as much as his body would allow. He had a love for prophecy, and his eyes were fixed on the return of our Savior and on the coming Kingdom of God. Mr. Silvera will be greatly missed by the Queens, New York, congregation.

Mr. Jack Willbanks, 85, died on March 6. Mr. Willbanks was a man of deep faith who had a lifelong curiosity about and appreciation for the world around him. He was a gifted musician and craftsman and had tremendous gratitude for his family. Mr. Willbanks is survived by his loving wife, Ann, and by their four children, twelve grandchildren, and 21 great-grandchildren. He will also be greatly missed by the Portland, Oregon, congregation.

A Time Like No Other

Do you have special memories of “the good old days?” Were they safer? More innocent, somehow? When I was a kid in school, growing up in the American South, the final dismissal bell at the end of the school year unleashed a veritable cloud of papers, notebooks, pencils, socks, and shoes as adolescents fled the scene of their “captivity.” They were ready to roam, “free at last” during the refreshing period known simply as “summer vacation!” This treasured escape of the year, when adventure was the only assignment, started with a jubilant burst of excitement. A couple of mornings learning the art of “sleeping in” would follow—then the exploring would commence.

Our town had an abandoned World War II airport—a perfect stage for endless exploits. Bicycle trails crisscrossed the forgotten, barely paved runways. The airfield’s open meadows provided battlegrounds for imagined military maneuvers that could last all day. With a few carefully placed objects, the same meadows became a ballfield for the next generation of big leaguers. When a rainstorm postponed the action, bordering trees supplied a partial haven—cover from *most* of the precipitation. After the rain, the wet grassy meadow was wondrously transformed into the county’s biggest “slip-and-slide,” since we were all soaked anyhow.

Abundant, wild, fruit-bearing plants supplied the daily cuisine. Strawberries, yellow and red plums, and blueberries ripened in early June and remained through the season until all were consumed. Varieties of blackberries also grew throughout the summer, providing nourishment until appetites were appeased—at which point we laughingly used the fruit as the forerunner of paintballs. The blackberry stain on

a white T-shirt was undeniable evidence of a masterful direct hit. What an adventure!

Will children around the world never again be free to lose themselves in the unabashed joy of life? Will there ever be a time when all will be safe to play and roam through God’s creation? Gang- and drug-related violence, kidnapping, conflict, and civil strife have given people more fear for their children than most of our parents ever experienced. We realize that such joyous childhood adventuring may seldom be possible until a different time, a future situation, a world to come—but it will come! And it will be different in a way *no one* has ever seen.

During a time of restoration for his people after their release from Babylonian captivity, the prophet and priest Zechariah chronicled the message of a future restoration—a vision of a world where Jesus Christ establishes and rules a time of peace unlike what has ever before been seen on earth: “Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem,” safe from the dangers that plague most major cities in our present age. “The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing,” records the prophet—a glimpse into this coming age when children will play in joyful exuberance, unencumbered by worries for their safety (Zechariah 8:4–5).

The Bible identifies this time as the millennial reign of Jesus Christ and the saints—a soon-coming period when the Creator of the universe will intervene, reclaiming this world from mankind’s self-inflicted chaos and establishing His laws on a foundation of love for our fellow man. God will create an environment where life will flourish and be cherished as the rule of God’s family is realized. Truly, that will be a time like no other.

—*Lehman B. Lyons, Jr.*