

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

LCG.org

November-December 2023

May Christ Be Formed in You

Dear Brethren,

Jesus told His disciples on the night in which He was betrayed, “You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am” (John 13:13). Other translations rightfully translate “Lord” as “Master,” a word that may sound antiquated and foreign to those of us raised in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In religious circles, we often hear people refer to Jesus as Lord. How many mindlessly call Jesus “Lord” without knowing what they are saying? You have no doubt heard the question, “Do you know the Lord?” We are all familiar with what the Apostle John has to say about that. “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:3–6).

The One whom people call their Lord asked, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). He furthermore declared, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). There is a principle here, regarding two masters, which goes beyond the matter of “mammon,” or money.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong often spoke of the two trees, two different ways of life—we might call them two “masters”—representing God’s way or Satan’s. God put it another way, showing two very different outcomes for the choices made. “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore

choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

“Choose Life” was the theme of our Christian Living classes at the teen camp in Texas this past summer. It was a good topic for teens; but, no matter our age, how well do any of us understand what it means to choose life? It is easy to parrot “choose life”—even quoting Deuteronomy—but, as Dr. Meredith often asked, do we get it?

A Closer Look

Let us go back a few verses to better understand the choice before us. “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil” (v. 15). That is the choice, the two options. But what does it mean in practice? Verse 16 explains what we must do if we choose life and good: “I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments...” Sounds simple enough—love and obey God. But is it? It is easy to focus on this part of the passage without putting it in the context of what follows; “But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them...” (v. 17).

Not only are life and good contrasted with death and evil; we are shown what these diverging ways look like—obedience to God, or worship and service to other gods. No doubt, the choice does not seem difficult until we look more carefully. The Apostle John instructs, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:15–16). Being the flawed human beings

Volume 25, No. 6



Inside This Issue...

The Hearts of Fathers to Their Children... p. 3
Onward from the Feast... p. 6
How to Meditate... p. 10
LE Alumni in Thailand... p. 13
2022 Financial Audit... p. 14

2023 Adventure Camp West... p. 15
God's Way Works at South Africa Camp... p. 16
Where There's a Will... p. 17
Snapshots from Teen Camp... p. 18
Local Church News... p. 22
Serving at Camp... p. 24

that we are, we can read these words, even memorize them, and still miss the point. Why?

It boils down to how we define the world. What *is* the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life? The heart truly *is* “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). There truly *is* a way that seems right to our human minds (that includes you and me), but that way ends in the wrong option of the two ways (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). The problem from the beginning is that we as human beings have a strong tendency, even if called by God, to do whatever is right in our own eyes.

The Apostle Paul spoke to the brethren as a father does to his children. So did Mr. Herbert Armstrong and Dr. Meredith, and as Dr. Meredith’s successor, it is my responsibility to do all I can to keep us on track. God warned Israel, “You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes—for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 12:8–9).

Dear brethren, it is evident that we *don’t* always get it. We know this because of the immodest dress styles some choose. We see it in the kind of dancing that sometimes shows up at weddings—usually after the pastor leaves. We hear it in some conversations about the ways in which people entertain themselves. We see it in some of the pictures, videos, and words that members post on social media.

Faithful Servants of Our Master

Not only do we represent the Church—even more importantly, we affect how the world views true Christianity. Do we understand what it means to be ambassadors for Christ? Are we properly reflecting Jesus Christ in our words and actions? Or are we trumpeting this current evil world? Are we wrapped up in politics, or do we look to Jesus Christ as our Master and soon-coming King? Do we assert trust in guns or “our rights”—or in the living Christ?

Everything we know, we see through the lens of the world into which we are born. We had no control over that, but with the Holy Spirit and life experience we are better able to filter out that corrupt world and choose the better way. Paul wrote

that “the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, *that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them* and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14–15).

Yes, we are to put to death the old man, as Paul told the Roman brethren. “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13). And to the brethren at Colossae he wrote, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). Note that in each of these three letters Paul is speaking to brethren, not outsiders. Is there a message here for us? Have we put to death the old way of looking at things and replaced it by feeding on Christ?

Also note that Paul expressed doubts about some brethren in the congregations he raised up in the region of Galatia. “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again *until Christ is formed in you*, I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you” (Galatians 4:19–20). Is Christ being formed in you? Are you sure? How are you sure? Walking in the footsteps of our Creator is not just about avoiding “big sins.” It’s also about the small decisions we make daily, the conversations we engage in, and the things we allow to occupy our minds. Every choice, big or small, matters in our journey of faith—so it is vital to continuously examine ourselves and strive to align our actions and thoughts with God’s word. Just as a small rudder can guide a large ship, so can our daily choices guide the course of our spiritual journey.

Paul explained that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.... Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:17, 20). Brethren, let us be faithful servants of our Master—ambassadors for Christ in word and deed!



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

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

©2023 Living Church of God™. Printed in the USA. All rights reserved. Postage paid at Charlotte, NC.

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

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

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



The Hearts of Fathers to Their Children

There is a chilling statement at the end of the Old Testament, of which we should all take notice: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:5–6).

This passage has puzzled many, and simply quoting it is sometimes enough to start debates among members of the various Church of God groups, including our own. Was Mr. Herbert Armstrong the end-time Elijah? What does it mean to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers?

This article will not enter the debate as to who fulfills this role, other than to say that John the Baptist was the one who prepared the way for Christ’s first coming (Matthew 17:11–13) and that the Church has always had a responsibility to encourage parents to teach the laws of God and His ways diligently to their children (Deuteronomy 6:7). As for the end-time Elijah, whether it was Mr. Armstrong or will be one of the future two witnesses, or even Elijah resurrected—all are a matter of speculation. God will reveal this in due time. Interestingly, the disciples did not recognize the Elijah who prepared the way for Christ’s first coming (Matthew 17:10–13). And while others focused on whether he fulfilled a prophesied role or not (John 1:19–23), John focused on doing the work he was called to do—pointing people to the One to come.

Utter Destruction

The last phrase in Malachi can be translated, “Lest I come and strike the earth with a *ban of utter destruction*.” Yes, this sobering note speaks of the earth being utterly destroyed unless fathers turn their hearts back to their children and thereby prepare a people for God.

Luke quotes this passage, but with a change of wording. Referring to John the Baptist, Luke wrote that “he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him [Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:16–17).

The difference between Malachi’s and Luke’s quotes is not as great as it may first appear. “Turning the hearts

of the children to their fathers” is in fact turning “the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.” Luke may have a broader audience in mind, but the result is the same: “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

The reference to *fathers*, as heads of their households, is not meant to exclude mothers (Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 1:8). Nevertheless, Scripture indicates that fathers must take the lead in instruction. God looked to Abraham to teach his family, saying, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing...? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” (Genesis 18:17–19).

End-Time Children

Fundamentally, Malachi shows us that there is a problem with children at the end of the age—and that parents are crucial in turning their hearts to God. Such turning does not happen by chance. It requires diligent effort by *fathers and mothers* at the end of the age to ensure that a godly generation of believers remains.

Other verses confirm that there is a problem with the last generations at the time of the end. Paul wrote that our world does “not like to retain God in their knowledge” (Romans 1:28). The result is a long list of sins, describing children as “disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful” (vv. 30–31). Paul told Timothy that perilous times would come “in the last days” and would include disobedient children (2 Timothy 3:1–2). Consider God’s voice through Isaiah and its implications: “As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths” (Isaiah 3:12). Is this not what we see today?

We live in a confused, upside-down world. God created Adam first and held him responsible for leading his family. That role for men has not changed. We must take the lead! It should go without saying that it is to be loving and caring leadership, but men must not neglect their role as leaders. The problem is not so much that women cannot lead, but that, in too many cases, men have not understood their role and have failed to stand up. This lack of leadership begins in childhood. Many men—including

many of you reading this article—*are* standing up, providing for their families and being spiritual leaders in their homes; but that is not happening in the world at large, and it is not happening perfectly in the Church.

We see several factors pushing against men fulfilling their God-given calling. Absent fathers are taking a toll on society, and this is not a male problem alone. Divorce is the fault of both men and women—and, sadly, the Church is not immune. There are an incredible 24.7 million children in the United States today who live in fatherless homes. That is one in three children! And the problem is not an American problem only. According to Statistics Canada, “In 2016, over 1 million children (1,114,055), or 19.2% of all children aged 0 to 14, were living in a lone-parent family, with or without grandparents or other relatives living in the home” (August 2, 2017). Note that this only includes children up to the age of 14, and even if the picture is less awful than the view of their neighbor to the south, who thinks that nearly one in five children living without a father is a rosy picture?

Note some of the tragic results of fatherless homes: “85% of children with absent fathers get involved in crime. 70% of children in fatherless homes have dropped out of high school. Children living in fatherless homes are 4 times more apt to live in poverty. Girls raised in fatherless homes are 8 times more apt to become a teenage mother. 85% of all children living without a father experience behavioral disorder” (*IncrediTools.com*, June 27, 2023).

Shout Out U.K., describing the “Famine of Fatherlessness,” points out the effects as they relate to girls and women. “In addition [to eating disorders], girls disconnected from their fathers tend to be more vulnerable, self-destructive, distrustful and consumed by fear of abandonment later in life. It’s been found that 71 per cent of pregnant teenagers come from fatherless homes; 92 per cent of girls raised in fatherless homes later suffer a divorce; and pregnant women without a present father experience pregnancy loss at a 48 per cent rate. Suffice it to say, growing up fatherless leaves marks” (*ShoutOutUK.org*, June 25, 2020).

While most statistics focus on the effects of fatherless homes, we should not neglect to highlight the benefits of righteous masculine leadership: “Teenagers with Positive and Nurturing Fathers Are 80% Less Apt to Go to Prison” (*IncrediTools.com*).

As many sources point out, there is a war against fathers and men in general, and this is not lost on boys growing up. Our most popular *Tomorrow’s World ViewPoint* video asks, “Do Schools Discriminate Against Boys?” This ViewPoint video by Canadian Regional Director and former educator Stuart Wachowicz has been viewed more than 3.3 million times and has garnered nearly 40,000 comments. Most of those comments come from young men who affirm that

they see bias against boys in school, but some girls have also chimed in. “Even when I was like 8 years old as a little girl,” one says, “I could tell something was off on how the guys in my class were being treated.”

But complaining about a problem—living as a victim—solves nothing. God wants both men and women to be overcomers, and the very act of *overcoming* indicates that an obstacle is in the way and must be conquered. Godly fathers must stand up and overcome the obstacles presented by Satan’s society as they manifest today, and they must help their sons and daughters do the same.

Cultural pressures are stacking the deck against men, and not just in school. Women are invading traditionally male-dominated jobs—construction, engineering, military, you name it. It should not surprise us, then, that men are now turning around and invading everything female, from bathrooms and changing rooms to sports. This is disgraceful and men ought to take the lead in speaking out against it.

However, this is Satan’s world—you and I are not going to change it now. That is reserved for another day. This is the world we live in, and it is for us to figure out how to overcome the obstacles facing us.

The Role of the Church

As anyone who knows me understands, I love working with young people. I am a huge supporter of our youth camps, enthusiastically support the Living Education program, and, along with Mr. Jonathan McNair, started our Living 4 Tomorrow program for young adults. However, neither camps, nor Living Education, nor L4T, are substitutes for the solid foundation provided by a family led by a godly, caring father with the help of a supportive wife. Yes, the Church can benefit the younger generation, but God’s focus is rightfully on families, where the most vital work takes place.

God’s command is to parents, not the Church, except as we encourage and support parents: “You shall teach them [God’s laws] diligently *to your children*, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deuteronomy 6:7–8).

And then there is this beautiful passage in Psalm 78, which explains the value of passing the works of God along from generation to generation:

We will not hide them [the works of God] from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should

make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God (vv. 4–8).

While this article focuses on fathers, it is not intended to gloss over the need for godly mothers. God presumes that both parents are working together in the family, side by side, just as He designed it. It is a beautiful thing when fathers and mothers both engage in raising children. Each adds different perspectives and different strengths. But as the world is attempting to dismiss the importance of fathers, we must not fail to proclaim that importance, which should be clear from the statistics given earlier.

Challenges of Our Age

Parenting has never been easy, but parents today face challenges their own parents never faced. Technology has changed our world, and we must not be naïve about the dynamics and difficulties it presents. Too few parents understand the damage social media can do to children; the rise in gender dysphoria, depression, sexting, loneliness, cyberbullying, sleep loss, and so much more can be directly linked to social media. Furthermore, video gaming can easily result in an addiction for boys and young men if left unchecked.

Recognizing these and other problems, adults in Greystones, Ireland, have banded together to ban smartphones for children up to ages 12 or 13—including at home. “Some kids in Greystones, Ireland, may have to wait until their teen years to partake in the latest viral dance craze, thanks to a voluntary ban on smartphones that has won the support of many area parents” (*BusinessInsider.com*, June 4, 2023).

In a May 31, 2023 op-ed for *The Irish Times*, Stephen Donnelly wrote in support of the ban:

Children and teenagers can be exposed to content on social media platforms that is damaging their mental health. Sometimes this damage is profound, with parents referencing anxiety, eating disorders, body dysmorphia, self-harm and suicide ideation. One of the problems is that the algorithms that determine what a child sees in their online feed can prioritise content similar to what they have already looked at. The objective is to keep the customer using the app for as long as possible. So, a girl looks

at something on slimming and can then be targeted with content on anorexia. I’ve spoken with parents who’ve told me about the heartbreaking damage this has caused their daughters. Some children and young teenagers are accessing pornography, including extreme content, with a range of deeply disturbing effects (May 31, 2023).

Donnelly also pointed out that the damage done to children by Internet content is stacking up in more and more studies. “The big increase in referrals to youth mental health services we’ve seen in recent years is linked, I believe, to what these reports are telling us.” Referring to the Greystones ban—voluntary, but with significant compliance—he wrote, “This unified approach by the parents means none of them can fall foul of that powerful, guilt-evoking cry: ‘But everyone in my class has one.’” To be sure, “everyone is doing it” is no excuse for parents not to stand up and make decisions that are good for their children, whether those decisions involve video games or the Internet. Doing so may even go against what other parents in the Church decide.

We often focus on what fathers can do for their sons, but what about their daughters? When the boxer Muhammad Ali lamented his daughter’s lack of modest dress, he could have given in to societal peer pressure—“everyone is dressing that way.” But he didn’t. He stood up in a firm but loving manner. This is a classic example of the importance of a caring father, as told by Ali’s daughter Hana.

He looked me straight in the eyes and said, “Hana, everything that God made valuable in the world is covered and hard to get to. Where do you find diamonds? Deep down in the ground, covered and protected. Where do you find pearls? Deep down at the bottom of the ocean, covered up and protected in a beautiful shell. Where do you find gold? Way down in the mine, covered over with layers and layers of rock. You’ve got to work hard to get to them.... Your body is sacred. You’re far more precious than diamonds and pearls, and you should be covered too” (Hana Ali, *More Than A Hero: Muhammad Ali’s Life Lessons Through His Daughter’s Eyes*, 2000, pp. ix–x).

Whether realizing it or not, Ali was following the instruction found in Deuteronomy 6. We are to instruct our children as we go through life experiences. When I see immodest dress in our girls or women, I often ask, “Where are the fathers?” As men, we sometimes need to stand up with firmness, go against the grain of society, forget what others are doing, and stop something that is hurting the family. We *must* turn our hearts to our children! ^{LN}



Onward from the Feast

By **Richard F. Ames**

Living Church of God brethren observed the 2023 Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day at 89 sites in 49 countries. From Mr. Weston’s Opening Night message, reminding us that we are learning the fear of God, to his Last Great Day message proclaiming that the masses of deceived mankind will awaken to have their first real opportunity to learn God’s way of peace, we all rejoiced at God’s “master plan” of salvation for all of humanity. An inspiring *Behind the Work* video gave us the blessing of learning more about our brethren in South and Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region.

What an amazing calling God has given us to train to be kings, priests, and judges for His coming kingdom and to assist Him now by helping to fulfill His “great commission.” I was personally moved to see, at the two Feast sites my wife and I attended—Branson and Lake of the Ozarks in the United States state of Missouri—how brethren generously served and loved one another as sons and daughters of the ever-living God, preparing to become eternal members of God’s royal family.

The Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day that we observed from September 29–October 7 should have been a spiritual highlight of our year. But will we take advantage of our experiences to help us grow spiritually over the next few months leading up to the Passover in April of 2024?

Most of us are familiar with the old hymn “Onward Christian Soldiers.” We even have it in *The Living Church of God Bible Hymnal*. Indeed, we must keep moving onward—forward in faith—toward the Kingdom of God. In this article, we will briefly consider seven keys to spiritual growth that can help us stay focused and maturing spiritually in the months ahead. These are basic points, but if we reflect on them deeply, we will be laying a foundation for growth.

Review Your Notes

When you are a student in a classroom, you know that it is important to take notes so you can study the material again

and again after the class is done. You want to internalize what you’ve been taught so it becomes a part of you and changes you for the better.

Your Feast notes should help to remind you that the time is soon coming when the desert will blossom like the rose (Isaiah 35:1). As Christians today, we are preparing to become the firstfruits who will play a part in fulfilling that prophecy. Reviewing your Feast notes can keep you motivated and inspired about your future.

We are training to become kings and priests in tomorrow’s world. Priests in ancient Israel had many responsibilities, including that of teaching the people. We as the resurrected firstfruits will have that responsibility in the Kingdom of God. Almost certainly you heard someone during the Feast quote these important words from the prophet Isaiah: “And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:20–21).

That’s a reference to our role as teachers in the Millennium, after we have been resurrected and have become members of the Family of God. The resurrected Jesus, too, taught His followers when He appeared to them in physical form. He even ate the fish and honey they gave Him (Luke 24:42–43). We will be teaching people who literally see and hear us as we guide them. Will they take literal notes at times? Very possibly. We look forward to the time when God’s way of life will be restored all over the earth, “and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:20–21). We will be helping to restore the truth, the true way of life and government of God. At the Feast, God, through His ministers, has given us tremendous instruction to both inspire and prepare us for our coming roles.

Years ago, I taught classes at Ambassador College, and even as a teacher I would review my notes so I would be prepared to teach. Your sermon notes are not just a routine; they are a tool to help you prepare for your future.

I know some of you, for various reasons, find it difficult to take notes. People do have different learning styles, and physical limitations may get in the way of taking thorough notes. Some brethren like to write down all the Bible verse references from a sermon, so they can go back and do their own Bible study that helps them remember what they heard. Others take detailed notes that are more like transcriptions. And don't forget that we have a great blessing in having many sermons available on CD or DVD or on the Church website. If you didn't take Feast notes, you may want to go online and listen to the Feast sermons at *Members.LCG.org*.

Keep on Learning

Reviewing our notes helps us keep fresh the memory of what we learned in the past. But we must keep on learning—growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. To prepare to teach, we must never stop learning. In one of the first Bible Studies I ever heard Mr. Herbert Armstrong give, back in the Shakespeare Club building in Pasadena, he told us that we needed to learn the following scripture: “Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day” (Psalm 25:4–5).

At the Feast, we learned much about how to walk on God's paths, in His truth. And that learning should continue. “Wise people store up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction” (Proverbs 10:14). Are we continuing to store up knowledge? How well do we know our Bible?

Decades ago, first-graders at the Church's Imperial Schools were taught to memorize more than a dozen short passages of Scripture, and to recite the Old Testament and New Testament books in order. They also had to learn the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and to recite the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17). It may sound almost impossible to us today, but first-graders were taught to memorize Psalms 1, 23, and 100; Matthew 6:9–14; 2 Timothy 3:15; Proverbs 3:1–35 (broken into four parts for easier recall); Matthew 5:1–20 (broken into two parts); and 1 Corinthians 13:1–13 (broken into two parts).

How many of us could benefit from going back to the first grade? Most of us can do much more than we think we can. The three basic principles of memorization are repetition, association, and impression. The goal of memorization isn't to accomplish something and forget it later; the idea is to internalize what we memorize, so that we never forget.

So, I encourage you to learn a psalm or two. Learn the books of the Bible. Review the *Tomorrow's World Bible Study*

Course, and consider taking advantage of the resources available through Living Education, online at *LCGEducation.org* as well as in person in Charlotte, as appropriate. If you are a teen thinking about preparing for adult life, you might want to talk to your parents and your minister about the ways Living Education can help you grow.

Set Meaningful Goals

You may want to set a goal of learning one of the psalms before next year's fall Festivals. We have our small and manageable goals, and they all should serve to help us attain our greatest goals. What is the greatest goal? The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the coming Kingdom of God, and our focus should be on preparing to serve in that Kingdom. How do we do that? “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

We should reject goals that would draw us away from God, and set goals that draw us closer to Him. How do we seek God's righteousness? All of God's commandments are righteousness (Psalm 119:172). As Mr. Weston has reminded us on many occasions, our world is sliding further and further toward a modern Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet we must live *in* that world, without being *of* that world.

You may want to set a goal of pursuing a career, or of learning how to manage a household. Some of our brethren earn technical certificates, or two- or four-year college degrees, or even advanced degrees in specialized fields. But be sure that you are seeking a godly goal; before you commit to engaging with the world's ideas of truth, be sure you are deeply grounded in God's truth. You may want to seek the advice of others with more experience before you set your educational goals.

Other goals, too, may be worthwhile, even if they seem difficult to achieve. You might want to make a plan to pay off a credit card debt in a year's time. You might want to get a certification in first aid, or CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), or as a lifeguard. There are even babysitting certifications available for teenagers who want to increase their knowledge and skill in that helpful service.

Other goals can be more personal. Perhaps you have a habit or a weakness you are trying to overcome. Set a goal of overcoming that problem within a realistic but challenging period of time. Use all the tools available to help you overcome. Those tools may involve specific actions appropriate to your problem, but do not neglect the fundamental spiritual tools of prayer, Bible study, meditation, and fasting. Beseech God, call on Him for help, and resolve to accept the help that only He can provide. And do not hesitate to call on God's ministers for their spiritual help. Resolve to overcome your problem, or at least make tangible progress, by next year's Feast of Tabernacles.

Broaden Your Horizons

At the Feast, we experienced one of Jesus' key sayings; "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Simply by attending the Feast, we are broadening our horizons, meeting new people, seeing new sights, and experiencing different historical and cultural features of the places where we gather. Many of us look forward to each January-February *Living Church News*, with reports and photos from Feast sites around the globe. Even if our circumstances don't let us travel internationally, we can get a glimpse of what life is like for our overseas brethren. For young people, the Church offers Living Youth Programs activities, which can broaden their horizons each summer at Teen and Preteen Camps, and Adventure Camps for those who seek greater challenges and opportunities to grow.

Broadening our horizons is an important part of gaining a "big picture" perspective on our life and purpose. We don't

There are thieves and robbers who seek to deceive and distract God's people, but those who persevere in the truth will recognize them and stay faithful to their Shepherd, **and they will imitate and follow His human servants as they follow that Shepherd.**

want to be like the rich young ruler who came to Jesus hoping to receive eternal life. Jesus told him to give up his possessions, because he was more attached to his things than to God's righteousness. God doesn't require all of us to do what Jesus asked of that young ruler, but He does expect us to be generous toward others and to put Him first, above our possessions. I hope that most of us at the Feast took advantage of opportunities to give of ourselves and our resources, to help others have a truly happy Feast.

As we broaden our horizons, we should come to understand that happiness itself is *not* a goal we should set for ourselves. As noted Jewish author Dennis Prager wrote in a *Reader's Digest* article some years ago, one secret to happiness is realizing that "happiness is a by-product of something else. The most obvious sources are those pursuits that give our lives purpose—anything from studying insects to playing baseball. The more passions we have, the more happiness we are likely to experience" (June 1998, p. 99).

If we are broadening our horizons—setting goals, continuing to learn, grounding ourselves in the truth God is giving to us through His word and His ministry—happiness should come naturally. We should remember these words of Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)—or, as James Moffat's translation puts it, "To give is happier than to get."

Let Your Light Shine

Some of you may know that lighthouses have long been a special interest of mine. In my office I have a tapestry of a Thomas Kincade painting of a lighthouse, on which there is a scripture: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Christ expects each of us, like lighthouses, to radiate His light to others. We read, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14–16).

It's not that we go out of our way to show off to the world. We simply practice God's way of life, which shows the world an example they just don't see elsewhere. Every year, our

Church Administration Department receives reports from hotels and convention facilities telling us that our brethren have been some of the kindest and most helpful, cooperative guests they've ever had—and we should keep up that example through the rest of the year. "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good

to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:9–10). We should not grow weary practicing God's way, as God's commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3). So, between now and next year's Passover, be sure to keep your light shining toward your brethren and all those around you.

Practice Perseverance

We should all be familiar with Jesus' exhortation that "he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13). And again, in Revelation, we read Jesus' promise: "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10). We must "keep on keeping on," knowing that God will give us the protection we need if we stay close to Him.

At the Passover next year, we will in a formal way renew our commitment to our Savior. Notice that we don't renew the covenant that we've already established, but we do—and must—renew our commitment, our desire, our energy to persevere, and our acceptance of His sacrifice to pay for our sins. True perseverance is an active process, not just passive tolerance of what befalls us. Paul urged the young evangelist Timothy, "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God

which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:6–7).

Are you stirring up the Holy Spirit that God gave to you when hands were laid on you at baptism? Are you living each day with a spirit of “Thy Kingdom come”? As Mr. Weston has reminded us, we don’t want to make the mistake of “setting dates” of when we believe Christ will return. I personally don’t believe we will have to wait any more than 15 years or so, but that’s just my belief.

And we know the attitude we must have, as shown by John at the end of the book of Revelation: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Revelation 22:20–21). We don’t set dates, but we should be praying for our Savior to return soon. When we look at the world around us, we see that each day without God’s kingdom is a day of mankind coming closer and closer to extinction. Our world needs the Kingdom of God. And for every one of us, individually, the Kingdom may come after our next breath. We may die at any time, and if we have put off our efforts to overcome, or have allowed ourselves to fall into practicing sin, we may lose most of our reward—or, if we are sinning in heartfelt rebellion against God, we may be resurrected not into the Kingdom of God, but to the Lake of Fire.

Why do we persevere? Not just for our own salvation, but because God is preparing us to help repair our broken world when Christ returns to set up His kingdom here on planet Earth.

Support God’s Work

The Work of God’s Church today is helping to prepare our world for that glorious time pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles. We know our mission, as Christ described it: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). Though they won’t be converted in large numbers in this age, the nations and their peoples will be put on notice, receiving a powerful witness. And we should seek to have the sense of purpose Jesus exemplified when He said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34).

We are called to be future leaders. But, to be good leaders, we must first be good followers who both know God’s truth and willingly follow Jesus Christ. Paul told the brethren to follow, or imitate, him as he followed Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Christ is the Head of the body, and the Church is that body (1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:4). The head knows the body, and the body knows the head. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

If we are following our Savior, we know that He knows us intimately, and we hear Him through the inspired words of Scripture, as well as through the leadership He has placed in His Church. Some in and around God’s Church have “itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3). But God’s people know their Shepherd, who told us:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers (John 10:1–5).

There are thieves and robbers who seek to deceive and distract God’s people, but those who persevere in the truth will recognize them and stay faithful to their Shepherd, and they will imitate and follow His human servants as they follow that Shepherd. When Mr. Herbert Armstrong was the human leader of the Church, the first item I read in every *Plain Truth* issue was his Editorial. I hope that when you receive each *Tomorrow’s World* magazine and *Living Church News* you are reading not just Mr. Weston’s articles but also his “Personal” and “Dear Brethren” messages. As Christians, we are developing in ourselves the character and mind of God, and we should want to know the “mind of the Church” in what God is inspiring Mr. Weston to share with us.

Onward to Passover

What will you remember most about the 2023 Feast of Tabernacles? What inspiring vision of the coming Kingdom will motivate you to grow spiritually in the next few months? This year was my sixty-third Feast of Tabernacles and was my wife Kathryn’s sixty-sixth—and every year we have found something new to appreciate about God’s ways and how He is working in our lives and the lives of our brethren. Whatever may be the standout lessons and memories of your Feast, I pray that you will remain mindful of the messages you heard at the Feast—that you retain the vision that was shared, heed the warnings that were given, and put into practice the teachings that were imparted.

We are preparing for a great day, not that far off, when, the kingdoms of this world will “become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). So, let’s look forward in faith as we move onward from the Feast! (LW)



How to Meditate

This is the final entry in our four-part “how to” series, where we have expounded on basic approaches to the spiritual disciplines: Bible study, prayer, fasting, and meditation. We hope that, whether you are new to the faith or have been walking in the way of God for some time, you have found these articles beneficial.

By **Jonathan McNair**

In previous articles, we’ve reviewed the importance and practical application of Bible study, prayer, and fasting. Another component to being a follower of Christ is equally important, but often neglected.

The Bible is full of scriptures using the words *meditate* and *meditation*. Yet, when we hear the word *meditation*, we may think of a person sitting cross-legged on the floor, repeating a mantra, with eyes perhaps closed or glazed over, as if under the sway of an occult power. If we have the Eastern religions’ idea of “meditation” in our minds, we may struggle to understand what the Bible means when the word is used. In this article, we will consider the meaning and importance of meditation as God defines it.

In the book of Joshua, we read that God spoke to Joshua and told him, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall *meditate* in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8). If we want to be successful as Christians, the skill of meditation must become part of our lives.

Secular meditation is often promoted as a tool to promote relaxation, reduce stress, and even bolster self-esteem. But biblical meditation has a deeper purpose meant to achieve more profound results. Proper meditation as the Bible describes it is fundamental to what we must do to come “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). Popular classes instruct meditators to direct their attention toward deliberately controlling one’s breathing or counting numbers, for example. Eastern meditation techniques often involve predetermined sets of words,

repeated mentally to induce an emptying of the mind. Even in mainstream “Christianity,” we find the use of rosary beads to give the meditator something to focus attention on while praying in an endless loop. But these attempts take people off track. Christ addressed this type of meditation when He said, “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words” (Matthew 6:7).

Repeating a mantra or short phrase may discourage distraction and promote focus, but this doesn’t draw a person any closer to God. Our desire is to follow the Apostle Paul’s admonition in Philippians: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). Our desire is to fill our minds with God’s words and precepts—pondering the words of God and how to apply them to the situations that confront us in life.

The Value of Focus

How many believe that “multitasking” is not just possible, but desirable? The idea of focusing on one priority—becoming absorbed in an activity—is often looked down upon in our busy world. Yet focusing, absorbing ourselves in reflection on the things of God, is what God asks us to do in practicing what the Bible calls meditation.

Today’s older generations grew up in a world where smartphones were not everywhere. Many older people remember the days before cable television and streaming media, when many cities had access to just a handful of over-the-air broadcast television stations. Researching a topic meant a trip to the library, likely including a careful search through a card catalog before wandering along row after row of books.

By contrast, many young people today have never known a world without literally hundreds of cable television stations

and streaming media sources. “Research” often amounts to typing a few words into a web browser. In one sense, this is remarkable technological progress, making once-difficult tasks far easier to accomplish. But a side effect of this ease is that younger generations have not had as many opportunities to develop their attention span—their ability to focus on a task for an extended period of time. Meditation can help us develop that ability to focus, but its practice may be especially difficult for those who have grown up in a world that makes so many competing demands on our attention. Still, meditation is no less important a skill and practice for older people—it is vital for people of *all* ages.

The word “meditate” occurs in a number of passages in the Old Testament. Isaac “went out to meditate in the field” (Genesis 24:63). Joshua was commanded to meditate on the Book of the Law, as mentioned earlier (Joshua 1:8). The word *meditate* appears six times in the *New King James Version* translation of Psalm 119. But what is the sense of the word? As we’ve been reviewing, it reflects the importance of focus.

In the Old Testament, there are two primary Hebrew words for meditation: *hāgâ* and *sîhâ*. They broadly carry the sense of musing, speaking to oneself, contemplating, or diligently considering. Pondering, rehearsing in one’s mind, and intensely dwelling on a thought also reflect the sense of these words. Said more succinctly, the meditation that we find described in the Bible implies a period of concentrated, laser-like focus on God, His precepts, and His handiwork.

David wrote, “I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands” (Psalm 143:5). Notice that David was *choosing* to focus his attention on the things of God. Let’s consider the implications of this.

God has created mankind with a spirit that differentiates him from the animals. An attribute of that spirit is the ability to choose—especially to make moral choices. We often recall the decision that Adam and Eve made to rebel against the command of God not to take from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Animals, functioning on instinct, are driven to act based upon what they see, smell, and hear. Dogs have a phenomenal sense of smell, and when a new scent greets them, their attention is totally focused on the source of that smell. But, like other animals, dogs don’t make reasoned, far-seeing choices that guide their actions. If they smell a squirrel, unless they are trained not to chase it, they will!

But humans are different. We can certainly be distracted by what we see, hear, or smell around us, but we can also *purposefully* and *intentionally* choose to focus our attention in a way that is uniquely human. That ability to intentionally *focus* is something that sets us apart from the rest of God’s physical creation. This ability is the basis of our ability to meditate and to choose the things upon which we will focus our mind.

Routine Renewal

In Genesis 24:63, we read that “Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels were coming.” It can be assumed that meditating was a regular part of Isaac’s life—perhaps he would often walk into the nearby field to think. Perhaps the smell of the grass and the cool evening air inspired him and prompted contemplation of the day’s events and the future. Do you have a favorite “thinking time and place”? I love to sit by a fire and think. Sometimes this includes thoughtful conversation with others and sometimes it’s simply personal quiet time, as I consider the blessings God has provided for me. Sometimes it’s more tumultuous, as I wrestle with how to understand God’s mind on a decision or course of action. We can meditate as we sit in a favorite spot, as we walk in a quiet place, while doing routine and “mindless” chores, or in the privacy of our room. We can meditate as we read and study God’s word, and we can even meditate in conjunction with our prayers to God.

But meditating is not just daydreaming. Meditating refreshes and renews our minds. Paul wrote, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed by the renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1–2). Christian meditation is anchored in a focus on God’s words. In Colossians 3:2, we read that we are to set our minds “on things above, not on things on the earth.” And we’re told to focus our minds on the things of God, bringing us closer together: “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 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” (Philippians 2:1–4).

Let’s now consider some specific objectives of biblical meditation.

Goals of Meditation

As we meditate, we can focus our thoughts on God, His glory, His creation, and His plan for mankind. In Matthew 6:9, we read that Christ instructed His disciples in the proper approach toward prayer. He said, “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” When we pray, giving honor to God should be front and center in our minds. We can extend this to our time in meditation; we should focus our thoughts on God, His plan, His creation, and what He has done in our lives. Psalm 77:12 gives us a window

into David's thoughts: "I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds."

We find opportunities to meditate as we read Scripture, such as when we read passages like Hebrews 2:10: "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." We can *meditate* on the implications of this statement for us and for all of mankind, and in doing so, we can be inspired to praise and give honor to God. But if we don't take the time to consider this statement, we might simply rush over it in our effort to complete our Bible reading for the day.

As we read God's words, recorded for us over many centuries, we also have the opportunity to receive instructions that apply directly to us and how we live our lives. But unless we think about how those instructions apply to us, we don't benefit from God's words. In Psalm 1, we read, "Blessed is the man

As we read God's words, we also have the opportunity to receive instructions that apply directly to us and how we live our lives. But unless we think about how those instructions apply to us, we don't benefit from God's words.

who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:1-2). Another psalm reads, "My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart shall give understanding" (Psalm 49:3). And yet another says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).

Again and again, we're reminded of the connection between God's instructions and meditation. The reason is this: Unless we proactively focus on thinking about what we read and how it applies to our daily lives, we're not fully benefiting from God's instructions as we should. God's instructions to us are amplified by our meditation. Reading the instructions is not the final step—it is the first step. When we ponder those instructions and how they apply to us, with the help of God's Spirit, we gain understanding. With experience and more meditation, and more learning, we continue to change.

Focusing our thoughts on God's words, allowing them to deeply soak into our being, can also help us overcome discouragement and negativity. God spoke to Joshua, saying, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage;

do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). The springboard for that sense of courage and motivation is found in the previous verse, in which God commands Joshua to meditate "day and night" on God's laws. Studying God's laws and principles, then meditating on them, gives us motivation and encouragement through God's Spirit.

Paul was inspired to provide this description of how God motivates and encourages us despite our weaknesses: "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26). This process of God helping and strengthening us happens as we focus on our heartfelt meditation.

Contemplating in a focused, directed way brings us closer to taking on the mind of God, through the power of God's Holy Spirit. Notice the process: In Psalm 4, we read, "Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still" (v. 4). Anger is a natural, human emotion—and it doesn't have to result in sin. But if we act as the animals do, without engaging our ability to think about our choices and their long-range impact, we might lash out. The Christian way to deal with anger is to stop, meditate on God's instructions regarding the matter, and then act accordingly.

We can't simply wish away the different emotions we have; we go through sadness, anger, grief, and frustration as part of the human experience, and we need to learn to handle those feelings. With God's help, we can learn to experience life without giving those emotions the unrestrained go-ahead that ultimately leads to sin. Focused meditation is the bridge between reading God's instructions and applying them to our lives. Rehearsing in our minds a proper, godly way of acting and reacting helps us to practice for real life. As time goes by, with the help of God, our goal is to reach the point at which we will reflect Paul's words: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

Meditation is not optional if we are to grow as Christians. We live in an age of distraction, so it will take our concentrated, proactive, and determined focus to apply the knowledge that God gives to us so abundantly in His word. Paul encouraged the Philippians to be mindful of what they focused their attention on when he wrote, "Finally, brethren, 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" (Philippians 4:8). We should do likewise as we use the tools of Bible study, prayer, fasting, and meditation. (LW)

Living Education Alumni Teach (and Learn) in Thailand

This past summer, four Living Education alumni had the opportunity to serve the Living Church of God Foundation in Thailand. Charles Austin, Kaleb Johnson, Ellie McNair, and Harmony Talbott traveled to Mae Sot, Thailand, in early June, where they helped to teach English to more than 400 Thai children at the Thesaban Tambon Mae Ku School. We caught up with them to ask about some of the challenges, rewards, and surprises that met them on their adventure.

Ellie and Harmony were housed by Church brethren in Mae Sot, enjoying daily communal meals and interactions with God's people. "While staying there, it was nice to have various meals together and watch the kids play during the evenings after school finished," Ellie said. "Even with the language barrier, it was comforting to know there were those of like mind nearby."

Harmony also highlighted the significance of meeting the local congregation members. "I enjoyed meeting the brethren in Mae Sot," she said. "We often hear of congregations all over the world, but until you visit those places, it doesn't fully sink in how vast and diverse the Body of Christ is. It's encouraging to see that despite our different backgrounds, we have the common goal of striving to be part of God's kingdom."

For Kaleb, the Thai cuisine presented both challenges and rewards. Adjusting to the spicy and rice-heavy diet was tough initially, and he occasionally craved American food—but, over time, he adapted. In addition to culinary challenges, Kaleb and Charles faced an unexpected sleeping arrangement—a former hospital meeting room with windows on all doors, which flooded the room with light at night. "However," Kaleb said, "all of this was manageable."

Charles remarked on the friendliness of the people and their willingness to communicate in English, which made the adjustment smoother. The teaching experience, initially daunting, turned out to be manageable, thanks to the dedicated local teachers. "The teachers who were already there did a very good job leading the class," Charles said. This collaborative approach, with local teachers translating, effectively bridged the language gap.

Ellie emphasized the uniqueness of being part of Living Education's inaugural group of alumni teachers in Thailand. After arriving, they shadowed Thai teachers, assisting them in their classrooms. "As the weeks progressed," she said, "we each settled into a routine of teaching the same students each day and developing tactics and methods to assist the teachers with their lessons."

Harmony found herself grappling with the language barrier. This obstacle, however, turned into an opportunity for

understanding, as it "helped me sympathize with the students who struggled," she said. "I could understand their frustration in trying to learn something so foreign." This immersion in a culture far removed from her own gave her unique insights into the struggles faced by her students. Interacting with both school staff and students, especially the first-graders, was particularly rewarding for her as she witnessed her students' joy in the learning process.

Teaching was also rewarding for Kaleb, who found satisfaction in building relationships with Thai students and teachers. "I learned so much about how to maintain control of a classroom, keep a pace of learning, and to use as few words as possible while being as clear as possible," he said, "which is especially important when the students do not speak much English!" He concluded confidently, "I will always remember and value this once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Charles concurred, adding that "the teaching was the most rewarding part. To work with the little kids, to see them getting English and having fun getting it—it's like a proud-father moment."

Exploring Thai culture and landmarks was also a significant part of the experience, from visiting temples in Bangkok to touring the Grand Palace. The four alumni also ventured to Chiang Mai, where they explored cultural sites such as the Royal Botanical Gardens and the night market. A highlight was their visit to an elephant farm. "Elephants are kept by the Karen people, who traditionally used them for heavy lifting in their jungle villages," Ellie shared. They had the opportunity to care for, wash, and even ride these majestic creatures.

The dedication of these alumni to serving the Living Church of God Foundation, as well as their openness to experiencing a new culture, exemplify the spirit of godly service that made this opportunity truly life changing.

—*Editorial Staff*



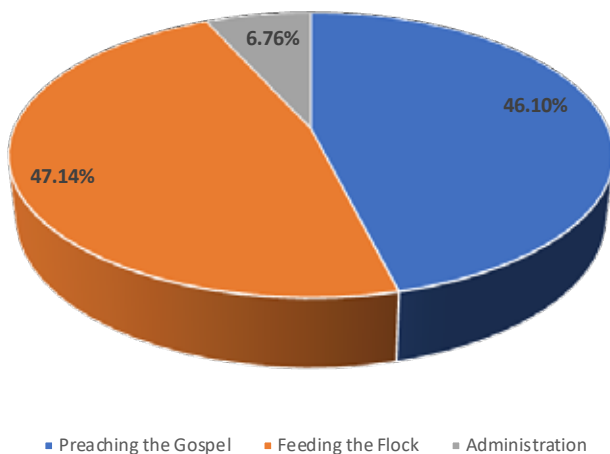
2022 Financial Audit in Review

By **D. Jerry Ruddlesden**

The Living Church of God publishes its audited financial statements each year. The complete *Living Church of God (International), Inc. and Affiliates Consolidated Financial Statements and Supplementary Schedules* can be found at the bottom of the LCG.org/about-us page.

The audit was conducted by Cherry Bekaert, LLP Certified Public Accountants, and the report of the independent auditor states their opinion as follows: “In our opinion, the consolidated financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Church as of December 31, 2022 and 2021, and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.”

Use of LCG Funds



In 2022, the Church allocated 46.10 percent of expenses to preaching the Gospel, 47.14 percent to feeding the flock, and 6.76 percent to administrative needs.

Previous articles have discussed the unexpected and significant financial blessings of 2020 and 2021 and the resulting strategies to expand the preaching of the Gospel. We began to implement these plans in late 2021, with 2022 the first full year of the expansion. This included hiring additional per-

sonnel, upgrading systems, increasing Internet advertising, increasing TV coverage, and temporarily increasing both the magazine circulation list and the number of issues printed annually. We also began to expand the scale and frequency of *Tomorrow's World Presentation* campaigns. The audit reflects those priorities—both in the draw-down of reserves and the increased percentage of dollars spent on proclaiming the message of the Gospel.

One of the more notable items this year was the \$160,083 replacement of our Mail Processing Department's main inserter, which stuffs letters, envelopes, and even booklets into mailers. It replaces an older machine affectionately named “Milly,” which has served us well and today has 11,571,615 duty cycles.

The story is even more interesting because, after purchasing the new machine, we were at first unsure of what to do with the old machine, which technicians had given up on as completely unusable. Should we sell it for scrap or for parts? Amazingly, our Headquarters ministerial trainee at the time, Mr. Julian Braddock, has a background in industrial production machines, and was able to resurrect Milly for use as a backup capable of handling some smaller, slower jobs. So, thank you Mr. Braddock!

This reminds me of how God blessed the artisans of Israel for the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 31. Of course, an inserter certainly does not compare to the tabernacle in complexity or importance, but it is a vital tool that we use to preach the Gospel and serve God's people. “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship” (Exodus 31:2–3). We each have a vital role to play as we prepare for the Kingdom. Whether in a congregation or working in Charlotte at Headquarters, God has called each of us and given His Spirit of power so that we can be a part of the Work at this time. This humbles and motivates me every day, and I hope it does the same for you.

Please continue to pray that God would send us resources as He sees fit and the wisdom to do His will as we preach the Gospel and feed the flock to the end of this age. (LM)

2023 Adventure Camp West: An Olympic Success!

By **Jonathan Bueno**

Fifteen campers (ages 15–20) and seven staff members enjoyed a very successful Adventure Camp in June, in the Olympic National Park in Washington state. Campers split into two hiking groups to tackle the North Coast Trail because of a park limit of twelve per hiking group. The two groups of eleven started at opposite ends of the trail, meeting in the middle on the second night out.

The sights along the rugged coastline were spectacular, with many sea stacks, beautiful rockfaces, and a lush, mountainous forest hugging the coastline. Look for photos at LivingYouth.org and on the Living Youth Programs Facebook page.

The groups had to work hard for those sights, as beaches were mostly covered in rocks, pebbles, boulders, and driftwood. Tides were never a danger, though they did affect the times we could set out each morning—an educational experience for everyone.

Basecamp on the first night was at the Forks Motel, with orientation on Sunday, June 25, taking place at Bogachiel State Park, about ten minutes south of Forks. Both groups finished the hike around 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, then went together to the Hoh Rainforest where they hiked the “Hall of Mosses” trail. It was a very impressive change of scenery.



Basecamp on the last day, Thursday, June 29, was at the cabin of a Church member. It was a great spot to end the activity, with everyone enjoying a bonfire and cookout. We had only relatively minor injuries—a few scrapes and one twisted ankle that seemed to improve toward the end of camp.

The Bible Study topics included “Creation Speaks: What the Creation Reveals About the Creator,” “Second-Generation Christians,” “How Adventure Camp Can Teach Us Agape Love,” and “Loyalty and Faithfulness.”

One highlight for me was noticing the difference between our group and another youth group of similar size that was camping near us on the third night. As I was waiting to use the restroom, several from the other group were there, and it was obvious that these were kids from the world, acting without a moral compass—very different from our Church youth. Several of our staff commented on what a good group of young people we had. One hiker I met along the trail even commented about the good behavior of our young hikers.

It was inspiring and encouraging to realize just how different our kids in the Church are from those of the world. Of course, this was just a small sample or cross-section of our Church youth, but it is noteworthy, nonetheless. From the onset, we tried to stress the importance of keeping God involved in what we were trying to accomplish at the Adventure Camp—and it seems that message came through. (LN)



God's Way Works at South Africa Camp

By **Scott D. Winnail**

Seventy-two campers and staff joined forces to make the December 2022 South Africa summer camp a tremendous success. The two dozen teens hailed from South Africa, Lesotho, Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), and Zambia, from where some of our campers and staff braved very difficult bus journeys to reach camp and return home. Thankfully, God provided powerful protection along the way. We welcomed staff from these nations, as well as from Ghana and the United States.

The camp was again held on the Western Cape at the Bergkroon Faith Centre, nestled at the base of the majestic Hawekwa Mountains. Camp director Lawdi Ferreira began the camp by reminding all in attendance that this was God's camp and that we must remember this reality throughout our time there. And God was certainly present! He blessed the weather with unseasonably cool temperatures most days—so overheating was not an issue—and He richly blessed the attitudes of all in attendance. The theme of the daily Christian Living classes this year was “What Are You Doing with Your Life?” Ministers Lawdi Ferreira, Patrick Wallace, Ryan van der Watt, and Scott Winnail presented daily interactive classes that included “What Lies Behind Your Comfort Zone?,” “Learn All You Can,” “Build a Relationship with God,” and “Do You, like God.”

The focus of the camp was reinforced daily as activity directors ended every activity with a discussion of the spiritual lessons the campers had learned. The Evening Reflection each night also circled back to the camp theme and Christian Living class topic of the day. Campers (both teen and preteen) were encouraged to focus on teamwork and avoid creating cliques, and as a result, an inspiring degree of unity and camaraderie ensued.

Camp activities were wide-ranging, including horseback riding, noodle hockey, soccer, water polo, team building, and a very challenging obstacle course. Arts and crafts, woodworking, a speech and journalism class, and a dance class rounded out the curriculum. One highlight was a Zoom presentation from Charlotte, North Carolina, by Mr. Gerald Weston. Another was a team braai (BBQ) cook-off, for which campers were paired with a minister to prepare and present a meal to a panel of judges (ministers' wives), and the entire camp enjoyed these meals during the lunch hour. The final activity of camp was an awards banquet and dance.

In my years of attending Church summer camps, many of which have been outstanding, this South Africa camp was the most spiritual I have experienced. The focus on God's way of life was present throughout the camp; each day began with

a staff meeting before breakfast, and it ended at night with a spiritually oriented Evening Reflection and hymn singing. Not only were the campers excited, spiritually moved, and motivated by the experience, but so too were the staff. Plans are underway for the South Africa summer camp of 2023, so for those interested in attending as campers or as staff, be sure to contact Mr. Lawdi Ferreira. 



Where There's a Will...

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

The Church's demographics are changing. Two or three decades ago, most of our members had come from our former association, and many of them were longtime Church members. Since then, many new people have come in. In addition, recent years have seen quite a few weddings of second- and third-generation members, and it's great to see all their kids at services. We grandparents love it! It's wonderful to see the teens and young families bring their liveliness and energy to fellowship on the Sabbath.

Many who came into the Church in the 1970s and 1980s (or earlier) have moved into retirement, so we are seeing the primary source of the Church's regular income transition to faithful newer generations. Many of the new attendees and baptisms that we are seeing are from that newer group. God always provides for His work!

The demographics of retirement have also brought other changes to the Church's finances. People in society often remember their church or favorite charities in their wills, and some of our members have been very thoughtful to remember the Church in their planned giving. We greatly appreciate it,

and we thank you! It is an important source of support for God's work.

Whether or not you remember the Church in your planned giving, it is important to your loved ones that you have a well-drawn will, or other testamentary instrument. Without one, things can be difficult for your survivors, and a poorly drawn one can be problematic. Preparing a thoughtfully considered testamentary instrument is an act of love.

It's good to seek the advice of legal counsel or a financial advisor, and most counselors advise even young couples or single adults to prepare testamentary instruments. Going through probate court can take years and can incur substantial costs, so it's wise to lawfully route assets around that possibility. Bank accounts, stock accounts, retirement accounts, and similar documents can have a designated beneficiary upon death. And, in most states, real estate can be transferred to a designated successor or beneficiary by filing a special deed that transfers the property automatically upon death while keeping owners in full control during their lifetime.

End-of-life healthcare is also an important consideration, and setting forth your wishes in advance relieves loved ones of difficult decisions at a difficult time. The end-of-life healthcare that you *don't* want may be as important a consideration as the healthcare you *do* want. Such matters are important personal decisions that can be made in advance. Advance healthcare directives are only used when individuals can't voice their wishes themselves, and are usually coupled with a durable power of attorney for healthcare, allowing important decisions to be made without difficulty. An attorney can give detailed advice on what is needed in your state or country of residence. Some states offer premade forms for their citizens to use.

You can also request our helpful free booklet *Planned Giving*, or you can read or download it at LCG.org/planned-giving. Local congregations should also have a copy of the booklet on their information tables.

You know the old saying: "Where there's a will, there's a way." That saying can be applied in more than one circumstance—if you don't have a well-drawn will, there may not be a way for your wishes to be carried out. A little planning can make a big difference! (L)

PLANNED GIVING

A guide to leaving a legacy of preaching the Gospel through your Last Will and Testament and other types of planned gifts

LIVING CHURCH OF GOD

Snapshots from Teen Camp

The following photos are from the 2023 Texas Teen Camp, held at the Lone Star Camp in the beautiful pinewoods of East Texas from July 11 to July 24. God made this year's Texas Teen Camp a great success, as you can see from these many smiling faces. We thank Him for a fun and spiritually inspiring camp experience, and we thank all of the campers and staff He used to make it that way!









Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. Michael (Heather) Alter, of the Melbourne, Victoria, congregation in Australia, celebrated their **50th wedding anniversary** on July 21. Mr. and Mrs. Alter have proven that living God's way of life over this span of time can solidify the holy union of husband and wife. Congratulations to the Alters on this wonderful milestone.

Mr. David Harrison and **Ms. Christina Karns** were married on July 16 in Joplin, Missouri, by Associate Pastor Shannon Christal. Many family members, friends, and brethren witnessed the beautiful ceremony. Mr. and Mrs. Harrison attend the Springfield, Missouri, congregation.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Adam (Michelle) Binns, of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation, are pleased to announce the birth of their second daughter, **Eloise "Ella" Charlotte Binns**, who was born at 4:20 a.m. on the Day of Atonement, weighing seven pounds and six ounces. Remarkably, her sister Lily was born during the Days of Unleavened Bread and her brother Max was born during the Feast of Tabernacles! Ella's family is filled with gratitude and praise to God.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard (Gretchen) Jacques are delighted to announce the birth of their seventh child, **Maverick Jordan Jacques**, who was born at 4:00 p.m. on October 14. This now makes six boys and one girl for the Jacques family, who are excited to share their new baby with the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Willy (Sabrina) Naguy were delighted to welcome a beautiful baby boy, **Douglas Naguy**, on July 28. He weighed 4.2 kilograms and measured 52 centimeters. Older sisters Dalisa, Debbie, and Naomie, and brother William, were overjoyed. The Vanuatu brethren also welcome this delightful addition to their Church family.

Ordinations

Mr. Shane Browning was ordained a deacon on August 5 by Area Pastor Rick Stafford. Mr. Browning serves in the San Antonio, Texas, congregation.

Mr. William (Bill) Cleveland was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets by Evangelist Richard Ames; Area Pastor Alex Celan; and elders Bill Whitaker; Franklin Frye; Lehman Lyons, Sr.; Scott Lyons; and Tadd Walls. Mr. Cleveland serves in the Augusta, Georgia, congregation.

Mr. Glenn Diekmeier was ordained an elder on September 16 by Area Pastor Bob Rodzaj, Associate Pastor Irv Woelfle, and elder Tim Markopoulos. Mr. Diekmeier serves in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, congregation.

Mrs. Tedi Freeland was ordained a deaconess on August 26 by Area Pastor Jonathan Bueno. Mrs. Freeland serves in the Boise, Idaho, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Cody (Cara) Ingram were ordained deacon and deaconess on September 16 by Area Pastor Anthony Stroud and elder Glendon Driver. Mr. and Mrs. Ingram serve in the Tuscaloosa, Alabama, congregation.

On the first Day of the Feast of Tabernacles, five deacons and one deaconess were ordained by Area Pastor Simon Muthama and visiting pastor Rick Stafford. **Mr. Justus Siboe**, of the Nairobi congregation; **Mr. Cornelius Muange**, of the Sultan Hamud congregation; and **Messrs. Stephen Mugambi, Paschal Mboroki, and Thomas Kithiniji**, of the Meru congregation, were ordained deacons, and **Mrs. Doris Kainda** of the Meru congregation was ordained a deaconess. All these congregations are in Kenya, and these ordinations were a joyous event during that morning service.

Mr. Mark Lorenz was ordained a deacon on September 16 by Area Pastor Bob Rodzaj, Associate Pastor Irv Woelfle, and elders Tim Markopoulos and Glenn Diekmeier. Mr. Lorenz serves in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, congregation.

Mr. Charles Mooney was ordained a deacon on August 12 by Pastor Wyatt Ciesielka and elder Carl Derstine. Mr. Mooney serves in the Jacksonville, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. Shane Picker was ordained a deacon on September 16 by Area Pastor Jonathan Bueno. Mr. Picker serves in the Richland, Washington, congregation.

In Loving Memory

Mrs. Elizabeth (Betty) Best, 84, a longtime member of the Church of God, died suddenly on August 31. She and her husband of 64 years, Mr. Frank Best, who serves the Halifax, Nova Scotia, congregation as an elder, would have celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary in December. A loving wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, she diligently served others by knitting, baking, providing lodging, and preparing meals. There was no end to her kindness, generosity, and outpouring of love. Her door was always open to all. Over a period of years, Mr. and Mrs. Best served Church areas in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Atlantic region. She lived a full life, led by her unwavering faith in God and love of her family and the brethren. Blessed with five children, as well as with grandchildren and great-grandchildren, she will be missed by all who knew her.

Mrs. Olive Taylor Brantley, 98, died August 24 after a long illness. Mrs. Brantley was baptized in 1956 and was a member of God's Church for 67 years. A faithful servant who loved God and the brethren, she was a joy to all and always had a kind word for others. Her beautiful, infectious smile would brighten anyone's day. She will be especially missed by the Lafayette, Louisiana, congregation.

Mrs. Lucy Brockman, 87, a longtime member of the Church of God, died at home on November 22, 2022, after a long illness. She was a much-loved member of the Berea, Kentucky, congregation, known for her warmth, sense of humor, and friendly smile. Mrs. Brockman and her husband of 67 years, Dan Brockman, were baptized together in 1962. She is survived by her husband; children Sherry Brockman, Leah Brockman, and Brian Brockman; six grandchildren; and one great-grandchild, with two more on the way. Mrs. Brockman was a loving wife, mother, grandmother, and friend. A wonderful homemaker, her favorite hobby was making handmade baby quilts for all the new arrivals in her life. She taught this skill to her granddaughter, Ashtin Nix, who continues in her footsteps with this labor of love. Mrs. Brockman will be greatly missed by her family and Church brethren.

Mr. Alfred (Al) Johnson, 94, of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation, died on September 5, 2023. Born on July 22, 1929, Mr. Johnson was called into the Church late in life and was baptized in June of 2010. He was known to have a ready smile and was always engaging, even while facing various health issues. His attendance at services was a great example for his brethren—if he was at all able to be there, he

would be. He is survived by his wife, three children, and six grandchildren, and the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation will miss his friendly smile.

Mr. Richard McCasland, 78, of the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation, died on July 20 after a lengthy illness. He was baptized into the Church of God in 1971 and remained devoted to God's truth, work, and way of life. Mr. McCasland was a loyal and generous person who enjoyed writing notes and sending cards to brethren, and to some who were incarcerated. He loved his pets and owned many generations of Yorkies. He enjoyed studying the Bible and, most of all, looked forward to God's kingdom. He was a former Staff Sergeant in the United States Marine Corps and a retired lineman electrician. Mr. McCasland is survived by his son, daughter, grandson, two sisters, and several other relatives. One daughter and his parents preceded him in death. Elder and longtime friend Mr. Michael Grovak officiated at the graveside ceremony.

Mr. Thomas (Tom) Zane McGaha, 83, died peacefully in his home on September 3, surrounded by family and friends, after a long illness. Born in Arkansas, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force after graduating from high school, and while stationed at a base in Louisiana, he met his future wife of 57 years, Evelyn. They were married in 1966 and he then began his career with South Central Bell (later AT&T), retiring in 2008. Baptized in 1968, Mr. McGaha was a longtime, dedicated member of God's Church. He was ordained a deacon in 1983 and lived a life of service as long as he was able. He was widely known as a man of gentleness, kindness, mercy, and faith. He was an avid and accomplished gardener, aided by his knowledge of weather patterns, which he had studied from boyhood. Mr. McGaha is survived by his wife, their daughter Dorrie Henderson, son-in-law Jon Henderson, grandson Joseph Henderson, granddaughter Kira Hall and her husband CJ, one brother, four sisters, and many nieces and nephews. Mr. McGaha will be greatly missed by family, brethren, and other friends.

Mr. Leslie Woods, 88, died on May 17. Mr. Woods was a faithful, longtime member of the Perth congregation in Australia, having been baptized for more than 55 years. He was a hard-working and cheerful man who always enjoyed talking with the brethren. Due to declining health, Mr. Woods was not able to attend services for the last year of his life, but he was diligent in reading the Bible and remaining faithful to God's ways until his death.

Electronic Service Requested

Serving at Camp: A High-School Staffer's Point of View

Being a dishwasher may not sound like the most glamorous of jobs, but it's an essential role at a camp. This year, I had the tremendous opportunity to serve in the kitchen as part of the high-school staff at the Living Youth Camp in Texas. This experience not only provided a fantastic opportunity to serve the campers—it also helped me gain a new perspective on camp and everything that goes into making it a success. Over the course of two weeks, our dedicated team—comprised of six volunteer dishwashers—washed more than 50,000 dishes for over 200 people. It was both a demanding challenge and a fantastic opportunity to provide a service to God's people.

It seems just like yesterday that I was a camper right alongside all the rest of the kids: fellowshiping, participating in fun activities, and learning about God's way of life. I've attended a camp every year for ten years, and those years as a camper were some of the best times of my life. It's easy as a camper to go about your day without giving a thought to what goes on behind the scenes. I know—I was guilty, too. This year, however, I was struck by the amount of effort and energy put in by the staff in order to make camp an enjoyable, uplifting experience for the campers. It was so encouraging to witness the staff selflessly give of their time in order to make this year a success in numerous ways.

That was something that really stuck with me and inspired me to think: *As a staff member, what can I do to help make this year a success? How can I effectively serve the campers? What can I do, even in my lowly role as a mere dishwasher in the back of the kitchen, to positively influence the lives of the kids?* After having been a camper for so many years myself,

the efforts of the staff I was now a part of really inspired me to put in the effort to “give back,” so to speak.

In Ecclesiastes 9:10, we read, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.” No matter what job you have, there's likely something to complain about. However, it is important to fulfill our responsibilities diligently and maintain a positive attitude. This is especially true at camp, where the focus is on the campers and helping them have an uplifting experience.

Being a staff member is more than just scrubbing dishes, retrieving misfired arrows, or filling water coolers; it's about facilitating an enriching environment in which the youth of the Church can thrive and build a godly foundation for life. Even the most mundane tasks can contribute to the greater mission of nurturing spiritual growth, and the dedication and effort put in by each staff member helps ensure that Teen Camp provides a wealth of godly examples to everyone who attends.

It's important to remember that even though high-school staffers are not adult staff, they are more than just “campers with extra free time.” They play an important role in the camp dynamics, and you can't just come and go whenever you like—there are responsibilities and expectations to fulfill. As staffers, our responsibility is to serve the campers and help support their spiritual growth. Serving as a high-school staffer requires focus and dedication. So, I hope this glimpse into the life of a high-school staffer, and the lessons I learned in that role, will inspire those of you who are able to rise to the challenge and join us next year as a staff member at Teen or Preteen Camp—or both!

—David Markopoulos