

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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What Is the Falling Away?

Dear Brethren,

What was the Apostle Paul telling us when he said the coming of Christ would not happen until “the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed” (2 Thessalonians 2:3)? Several ideas have floated about in recent years. Some Church of God groups, and many brethren throughout, see the apostasy in the Worldwide Church of God as fulfilling in full the “falling away” part of the prophecy. More recently, the Living Church of God has taught that it refers to a broad rebellion against God at the end of the age. But, while the rebellion against God in our world is indeed broad, is that interpretation the accurate one? For context, here is the relevant passage:

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [the return of Christ] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

There is no doubt that what occurred in the Worldwide Church of God was an apostasy from truth. And, truly, those who fell away in that organization “did not receive the love of the truth” (v. 10). But was that what Paul was describing? Or was he referring to something larger?

Those of us who experienced it firsthand know that WCG’s apostasy was a traumatic experience, so it is easy to jump to the conclusion that it fulfilled Paul’s warning. However, the passage strongly suggests that Paul was tying the “falling away” with the “man of sin”—a “lawless one” who would come

with “power, signs, and lying wonders” and will be destroyed “with the brightness of His coming” (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10). The revealing of the man of sin need not happen immediately after the falling away, as we will see later, but it is clear that Paul sees the two as related. Yet, no miracle-working false prophet who will be destroyed at Christ’s return came out of the apostasy of the Worldwide Church of God. As heinous as WCG’s apostasy was, it did not fulfill Paul’s prophecy.

Falling Away from a Previous Position

One would have to be blind not to recognize the breathtaking decline in biblical values among the Israelite nations. While the United States and the British-descended nations were founded on some biblical principles, most, if not all, of these nations no longer even consider themselves “Christian nations.” This has been expressed by no less than former U.S. President Barack Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Census data indicates that the U.K. has abandoned a Christian identity, and much the same can be seen in Australia and elsewhere.

In a very short period of time, we have seen a near-total transformation of values. In the Republic of Ireland, nominally Roman Catholic voters approved abortion for their nation. The LGBTQIA+ movement is gaining acceptance at an alarming rate. Indeed, there is a strong bias against anything smacking of biblical values. “Anything goes”—unless it comes from the Bible. But we must ask: *Is this what Paul referred to?* It is easy to read into the Bible whatever we see at the moment. But we must be careful not to read current events into the Bible where they do not match the context. We must look to the Bible to explain itself.

We have heard the exhortation, “Put Christ back in Christmas,” but we also know that He never was in Christ-

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mas. Similarly, though we may romanticize the “Christian past” of our Israelite nations and lament the loss of “a more innocent time,” we know there is more to it than that. I once thought that calls from the pulpit to “get back to the faith once delivered” meant nostalgically going back to the 1800s, when people read the Bible by kerosene lamps. But when Jude urged the people to get back to the faith once delivered, he was referring to the faith of Christ, His apostles, and early first-century Christianity (Jude 3–4). That kind of Christianity has very little resemblance to trinitarian “Christianity,” no matter the century.

Did people have more respect for the Bible in times past? Without a doubt. But, as we know, most of those people were not true Christians. How often I hear people express the idea that they were good people who merely “had the wrong day.” Not so, dear brethren—the Sabbath is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Without realizing it, those innocent “good Christians” had received the Beast’s mark by replacing the seventh-day Sabbath with Sunday worship.

Many of us were once a part of that satanic system. We worshiped a trinitarian god and accepted pagan holidays and practices with the name of Christ attached to them. We believed in an immortal soul, going to heaven for eternal retirement, and the wicked burning in excruciating hellfire for all eternity—including billions who never heard the name or message of Christ. Did God tell us to come out of Babylon for no reason (Revelation 18:2–4)?

Paul warned against false teachers preaching another Jesus, promoting a different spirit, and proclaiming a different gospel (2 Corinthians 11:1–4). He did not mince words about who these preachers served. “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (vv. 13–15). Many of Satan’s ministers are no doubt good men, humanly speaking. Most are deceived themselves in many ways, but though they may be well-meaning, they are leading people away from the true Jesus of the Bible and His message.

Our mainstream “Christian” ancestors fought religious wars, murdering other “Christians.” Dr. Roderick C. Meredith’s *The Plain Truth About the Protestant Reformation* is an important book that chronicles the roots of mainstream Christianity—and the roots are rotten. Again, this does not mean that people are not sincere; we simply know that their time of judgment will come later.

I often ask people who attend our *Tomorrow’s World* presentations, *Who are the harlot daughters of Revelation 17?* Is it really better to attend with a harlot daughter than to attend with the great mother harlot? I ask this not to condemn, but to explain: Catholics and Protestants are deceived. We are not warned against “religious deception” in general, but “Christian” deception (Revelation 6:1–2; cf. Matthew 24:4–5). While we may feel nostalgic yearnings for our childhood world, we must understand what is wrong with *all* of mainstream Christianity as God reveals in His word.

The idea that the prophesied falling away is found in our wider world abandoning its past heritage—religious or otherwise—just does not stand up against the biblical facts. True, this world is currently moving away from a worldview it previously held, but this is not what Paul referred to. A decade or so ago, many of us thought it might be, but this is simply not the case. This is the conclusion the Council of Elders came to during our November 2023 meetings.

Of course, it is clear that the changes in our culture—and its increasing rebellion against God—are significant, and the Council noted that other passages in the Bible *do* speak to the fact of sin and iniquity reaching its fullness. But our conclusion was that the “falling away” passage in 2 Thessalonians 2 refers to something else.

The distractions of what happened in WCG and what is happening in our world today do not provide the answer to Paul’s warning. So, what is the answer? What *really* is the falling away?

Already at Work

Let us return to what Paul wrote, and look at the broad scope of history. Paul gives an important clue when he tells

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A Young Lady's Questions

We are all home from what so many are saying was another wonderful Festival season. However, when it comes to the meaning of those special days, we do not all relate to them the same way. Those who are older, who are married and perhaps have children or grandchildren, look forward to Jesus Christ's return—it cannot come soon enough! We see a world of hurt, and some of that hurt may be very personal as our physical bodies break down. Parents with school-aged children, concerned about a corrupt world trying to destroy their precious ones, hope for Christ's return to come as soon as possible. Small children, hearing a sermon mentioning Isaiah 11, may look forward to having a pet lion who will not eat the family lamb.

We all have different reasons to pray, "Your kingdom come!" But not everyone prays that prayer with the same enthusiasm—or even at all. This was brought home to me three decades ago when I received the following letter from a sincere 16-year-old. Even though she signed it anonymously, I knew who this very fine teen was, and I saved the letter, as it expressed what more than a few think but do not say.

I am writing you to ask about a topic that has been on my mind for over two weeks now. Every once in a while, "life" questions pop into my head and, most of the time, I can either answer them myself or ask someone who can help me. This question, however, has not been answered and my curiosity has definitely grown. I will do my best to express my question clearly.

When a baptized man and woman marry, they are physically bonded. Marriage is "until death do us part" (if all goes well, considering TODAY'S marriages. Sad, but true—yes?). If Christ returned while this couple was still alive, they would then be spirit beings in the Kingdom of God (given they have God's Holy Spirit). I have found in Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25, and Luke 20:35 that "marriage" is not possible

as a spirit being. My question, which will be broken into other sections and topics, starts as "what happens to those feelings?" Togetherness is one thing, but a bond is another and that sounds so much better when you care for someone to a great extent.

Another question: "Can we manifest into physical beings and have that bond?" I looked through my Bible concordance (Strong's Concordance) and found Isaiah 30:20, which says that we can show ourselves as "physical teachers."

I suppose that my main question [has] to do with marriage and where the feelings go and how you look at your "ex-spouse" during Christ's reign. I can see it now—"Hey! How's it goin', Bob?" (Bob is just a name.) I mean, you know everything about them, you have had good and bad times together, and you have shared affection. How does a person, or I guess in this case "spirit being," just drop all of this? I understand that you can BE together and you have strong feelings still, but there is a difference, correct?

My next question may sound like an "I-should-have-known" question. I don't look at sex as such an important thing for me as a teenager. I understand and believe in God's law about abstinence but, out of curiosity, I am asking. Sex is a very special thing that God gave man. When a couple have this commitment, feelings of love increase, and the sense of security is there. It makes your marital bond more "official." We can't have this as spirit beings, correct? Can we change to our physical selves with our spouse (that we had before changed to spirit beings) and have that?

Another branch to take on this (are you still with me?), if the last question was answered yes (if at all), would be “can children come into the picture at this point and time?” What if Christ comes back and, as a couple, you haven’t started your family? If you couldn’t have this family, wouldn’t there be something “missing”? One of my sources I asked told me that God may not change a person to a spirit being if they are not ready. Is that true? Would he allow a couple to start a much-wanted family?

At this time, there are so many questions racing through my mind. I know that some of these questions are impossible to answer until man is actually living through the time of Christ’s return. But if you know an answer or two to any of these, I would love to hear them. I happened to be very intrigued by this subject and others may be as well. I have never heard a sermon of its type—is there enough scripture, questions, and answers to make one?

I have run out of time in my typing class. I thought that I would ask, since it has been bugging me for so long. I also hope that staying anonymous with a desire to learn about this, will (maybe) trigger a discussion or a sermon (my preference, personally). Thank you for your time!

Kansas City East Y.O.U. Member

Those are heavy-duty questions. While other teens and young adults might not express them so eloquently, some of those questions are no doubt on the minds of many.

Many older adults have experienced the things this bright young girl wanted in life—marriage, sex, children. These are all God-ordained gifts when experienced according to His will, but the older we grow, the more we see the limitations of physical life. We not only see suffering and pain in the world around us, but we share in the same. If we understand God’s plan, we yearn for that better world and a better body. This is not merely philosophical—it’s personal.

Teens and young adults, however, through lack of experience, usually do not have this same perspective. At their stage of life, they may view Jesus Christ’s return as an event that will interrupt their hopes and dreams. The questions

expressed in this letter are really saying, *When Christ returns, this may prevent me from getting married, experiencing sex with that person of my dreams, and experiencing children of my own.* Put plainly, *Christ’s return may mess up everything that I look forward to that is pleasurable and rewarding.* This young lady did *not* have a bad attitude. She was expressing sincere thoughts that many Church teens feel when they think ahead based on where they are in life, and this is quite understandable.

An industrious young man in his early twenties expressed it even more openly to me: *You and my father want Christ to return, but I don’t want Him to come right now. I want to have time to get married, have children, and make my mark in the world.* This was an honest expression of how he sincerely felt at his stage in life. He wanted Christ to return—just not right then. This young man did get married, had children, and built a successful business from scratch with scores of employees. And, over time, he, like so many of us, learned that life in the “here and now” was not all he expected it to be. He eventually walked away from the successful business he built, and one of his children had serious health issues. Life has a way of “beating us up.”

Not Always as Planned

So, how should we address this young woman’s questions? How might we explain to a young man who hasn’t yet “made his mark in the world” that it will be good for him if Christ returns before then? How can we hold out hope in a world wallowing in confusion and *lacking* hope?

The Bible gives us vital answers. We read of how other young people faced disruptions to their hopes and dreams—and how life still turned out well for them. It is no accident that God gives us accounts of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as well as accounts of Esther, Ruth, David, Jeremiah, Jacob, Joseph, and many others. We see that their lives did not always go the way they had planned.

Joseph no doubt wanted love and marriage as much as any virile 17-year-old, but his life took a shocking turn when his brothers sold him into slavery. We learn how traumatic this was when his brothers were confronted 13 years later with a similar circumstance. “Then they said to one another, ‘We are truly guilty concerning our brother, *for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us*’” (Genesis 42:21).

Yet, while Joseph was in slavery, Potiphar’s young wife constantly tried to seduce him. He could have given into temptation and fulfilled lustful desire, but he refused to—and for his righteous decision, he ended up in prison. How many young men would be so honorable? Remember, Joseph did not yet know the rest of the story; what he knew was that God exists and must be obeyed.

We find the same message in the book of Daniel. He and his three friends found their lives rudely interrupted by war, and were transported to the land of their captors. All their hopes and dreams were shattered, and they had no understanding of what lay ahead. However, they were good students, they had faith in God, and they possessed great courage—all traits that served them well in Babylon.

History tells us that other captive Jews settled into life, married, and had children. One of their descendants was a young woman named Esther. Many young women dream of Prince Charming sweeping them off their feet as they ride off into the sunset together, but marriage to King Ahasuerus, who had a sizable harem, was not the same, even if you were the first among the others. Yet Queen Esther exercised faith, courage, and self-sacrifice—and God used her to save the Jewish people.

While Ruth was still young, her first husband died. We may romanticize her story and eventual marriage to Boaz, but it was not what she planned her life to be. Her story reminds

“At this time, there are so many questions racing through my mind. I know that some of these questions are impossible to answer until man is actually living through the time of Christ’s return. But if you know an answer or two to any of these, I would love to hear them. I happened to be very intrigued by this subject and others may be as well.”

us that life comes with many twists and turns. We plan, we dream, we expect; but plans, dreams, and expectations often go awry. So, what advice should we give to young people who do want Christ to return—but not to return so soon as to spoil their plans?

We must not shrug off their concerns. *Wait until you get older; then you will understand* is not sufficient advice. Young people need to know that we care about them and that we respect their concerns. The truth is that we do not know the answers to every question in this teenager’s letter—but we know some, and can address others appropriately.

Most of our worries never materialize; the letter from this young woman was written nearly three decades ago, and she likely got married and has children. But what about today’s teens? Sometimes, in our attempts to make the Kingdom of God more appealing to children, we talk about pet lions, tigers, and bears (Isaiah 11:6). This is true, and may appeal to a ten-year-old—but not necessarily to a teen whose hormones have begun stirring. Forget exotic pets; they are

now interested in romance, marriage, and sex. Were we any different?

They, too, may wonder whether they will be changed to spirit before they marry and have children. They may wonder: If they are baptized, can they choose to *remain* physical to have and raise children? And as Spirit beings, will they be able to physically manifest again, to share intimacy with the spouse they had during physical life?

Maturing Desires

It may help to realize that we very naturally have different interests and desires through different stages in life. A five-year-old may want to know whether Spirit beings can eat french fries and ice cream. Will his dog Buffy be resurrected? (More than one adult has asked that question, actually.) But, as we grow, our desires change.

My childhood friends and I would go to Saturday-afternoon movies to see our favorite cowboys. We were not into singing, guitar-strumming cowboys—and *cowgirls* were a boring distraction. No, we were into fist-fighting, gun-slinging cowboys. Our favorite scene in every movie was the barroom brawl, with chairs and bottles breaking over heads and people thrown through windows. But, somewhere along the line, this changed. Those *Beach Party* flicks with Frankie and Annette became more interesting. Then there was Elvis and *Girls! Girls! Girls!*

What caused this transformation? The truth is, something called hormones. And those hormones did not happen by chance. God gave us this transition in life. He made us male and female. It was He who gave us this wonderful gift. A life of 70 years may seem like forever when we are 16, but it is not, as we all come to realize. Yet, He gives us the potential to live forever. Would a loving God give us the dessert before the broccoli? Hardly. “You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

Music is another example. Consider what is considered fine music to a seven-year-old: He may not relate well to “All I Ask of You” from *The Phantom of the Opera* or “I Dreamed a Dream” from *Les Misérables*, but given a decade or two, these songs may move him to tears. One must wonder: What kind of music will there be in the Kingdom?

The Apostle Paul confirms life’s stages. “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:11–13).

At first, most teens understand love in terms of how other people make them feel. God made us this way. But He expects us to grow to understand love beyond emotions and passions. Godly love involves actions that demonstrate outgoing concern. “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4–7). We must not minimize the value of affection between a man and a woman, but it is important to teach young people that there is more to love than personal feelings. This knowledge comes with maturity, and the young lady who wrote the letter was clearly mature enough to begin thinking and reasoning beyond just emotion.

A fulfilling life involves much more than sex. People find great reward in work and seeing a project through to the end. Couples may choose to spend their Sunday afternoons watching their favorite sports team. Physical intimacy is wonderful, but it is not everything. We learn that with maturity, but this does not mean that we should disregard a teen’s questions and concerns. We are made to go through these stages of life, and as adults we must be sensitive to our children’s questions.

Now, let me briefly and directly answer a few of the questions I was asked.

Q: What happens to those feelings?

A: The feelings will no doubt be there and even increase. As we grow older, sex is not normally such a big part of life, but we all know older couples who grow in their love and respect for one another. When we read of how Jesus spoke of the Father, we perceive strong feelings. The question is not whether the feelings are there, but how they will be expressed. To the best of our knowledge, we will not need the physical act we refer to as sex to express and receive those feelings.

Q: Can we manifest into physical beings and have that bond?

A: It is my guess that we will have no interest in doing so; we will be too busy doing other, more interesting things. I understand that this is a hard sell to the younger crowd, but remember how important a child’s game once was and how it has ceased to interest you today.

In the same way, eternal life will be filled with incomparable joys and excitements, such that it’s hard to imagine we’d ever want to go back to things that were mere shadows or pictures of eternity. Again, King David longed for the “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forevermore” ahead in God’s Kingdom (Psalm 16:11) and says that a single day in the Kingdom with God is better than any 1,000 days one could live in this life (Psalm 84:10).

Q: What if Christ comes back before a couple has children?

A: This physical life offers no guaranteed future—many people are childless for other reasons than Christ’s return—and eternal life in the Kingdom of God will no doubt change how we think about various subjects. Note how God addresses this question: “Nor let the eunuch say, ‘Here I am, a dry tree.’ For thus says the LORD: ‘To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, even to them I will give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off’” (Isaiah 56:3–5).

God’s point to the eunuch is that eternal life in glory in the Family of God will be so great that even the eunuch will not look backward and think he had “missed out.”

A Life Entrusted

Youth is a special stage in life, meant to be enjoyed. However, wise young people grow to understand that what is important today may not be so important later. They also recognize that God knows best, and they learn to turn their lives over to Him as a result. “A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). Jeremiah was not much more than a teenager when he wrote, “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O LORD, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing” (Jeremiah 10:23–24). Note how he entrusted his life to God’s hands. Jeremiah did not even fear correction; he demonstrated faith that, in every way, God would do nothing for him that was not in his best interests.

Solomon tells us to enjoy the life stage in which we find ourselves. “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity” (Ecclesiastes 11:9–10).

Brethren, we must listen to our children’s concerns. We must reason with them based on their level of maturity. We must admit that we do not have the answer to every question—but we can point them to the God of love. We can encourage them to trust that God will only do for them what will make them truly happy in the long run. We can invite them to be part of the greatest cause ever given mankind—involving themselves in the very Work of God. We can give them a hope of a world far better than the violent and confused one in which they now live. We can encourage them to learn patience, to take life as it comes, and to avoid taking shortcuts that only bring heartache. And we must learn how to inspire hope within them. Only then will they find the answers they seek. (LW)

Immerse Yourself in the Truth

By **Richard F. Ames**

When you go for a walk, you probably don't often think of the air around you. You're walking in an atmosphere of oxygen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and other gases. It's around you all the time. You're immersed in it so thoroughly that, even though it sustains you, you hardly notice it unless you pay special attention.

When you involve yourself in some activity so closely and intently you barely think about or notice what else is going on around you, you are immersed in that activity. Maybe it's a game of chess, or a challenging puzzle, or a deeply introspective meditation on something you've read in the Bible.

As Christians, we should have that kind of relationship with God's truth. We want to be immersed in it. We want to walk in an atmosphere of truth. We want it to be so much a part of our lives that we can't imagine living without it. In this article, we'll consider seven principles for clothing ourselves in the truth, surrounding ourselves with the truth, and internalizing the truth—*immersing* ourselves in the truth. There is some overlap among these principles, and if we organized them in other ways we might outline five broader principles or ten narrower ones. But I hope you will appreciate this overview of the ways we can and should make the truth an indelible part of our character and our life.

Treasure the Truth

Do you treasure the truth? Christ gave us this parable: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:44–46).

What is the pearl of great price? It is the truth of God's way of life—His plan of salvation and His gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Do you treasure that truth? The Apostle Paul wrote about some who do not. "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous de-

ception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:9–10).

We in God's Church have received the love of the truth—and we should love our Savior. When the resurrected Jesus was challenging the Apostle Peter in John 21, and said, "Simon... do you love Me?", He used the Greek word *agapaó*, meaning spiritual love. But Peter answered, "I love You" using the word *phileó*. After two uses of *agapaó*, Jesus changed the question and asked, "Do you love Me?" using *phileó*—brotherly love. And again, Peter said, "You know that I love You [with a brotherly love]" (vv. 15–17). Peter did not say *agapaó* love in this situation, but this was before the gift of the Holy Spirit. God has given us *agapaó* love, which we ought to treasure and use.

We must not be like those Jesus warned about whose love would grow cold (Matthew 24:12). We must not take pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thessalonians 2:12). Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). We need to treasure the truth He has given us.

And how do we apply the truth in our lives? If we are rejoicing in the truth, we're *thinking* the truth. It's the very first object or concept of meditation Paul mentions: "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).

What does Paul say about love? "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:4–8).

Know the Truth

Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). As Christ's followers, we have access to the greatest freedom that anyone can have.

Are we gaining more knowledge of the truth? Do we study the Bible regularly? If you haven't already done so, I urge you to study the lessons in the *Tomorrow's World Bible Study Course*. You can enroll in the course online or ask for the printed version. And Living Education is not just for young adults in Charlotte—at *LCGEducation.org*, you will find study resources for brethren of all ages. And, of course, we hear sermons every Sabbath.

Christ prayed to His Father, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth” (John 17:17–19). To “sanctify” means to consecrate—to set apart for sacred purpose. It has the idea of separation—to separate the pure from the impure. Knowing the truth sets Christ’s followers apart from the world. The world is deceived by Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44). But we as Christians know the word of God. And we know, “The entirety of Your word is truth” (Psalm 119:160).

As Christians, we must not forget the truth. We read, “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (James 1:16–18).

If you are a baptized Christian, do you understand that, having received God’s Holy Spirit, you are begotten by God’s very word of truth? That itself is an awesome truth!

Live the Truth

Scripture tells us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). What must we have in order to live? The gospels give us Christ’s answer: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Luke 4:4). We also read, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever” (Psalm 111:10).

How do we gain understanding? How do we live the truth? Christ said plainly, “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that [it] may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, [which] the world cannot receive, because it neither sees [it] nor knows [it]; but you know [it], for [it] dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:15–18).

Jesus told His disciples, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when... the Spirit of truth, has come, [it] will guide you into all truth; for [it] will not speak on [its] own authority, but whatever [it] hears [it] will speak; and [it] will tell you things to come. [It]

will glorify Me, for [it] will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:12–14).

God has given us the Spirit of truth—and what does the Spirit do? It gives us the truth! God is giving us the wonderful gift of truth, the Spirit of truth; we are begotten by the word of truth, by God’s Holy Spirit. And we have a weighty responsibility to live by the truth we have been given, as we must not fall into heartfelt rebellion and risk losing our salvation. “For if we sin willfully after we have received the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (Hebrews 10:26).

Rejoice in the Truth

Paul wrote the book of Philippians while he was in prison. While he was there, he gave us one scripture that sometimes seems a bit hard to apply: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). It’s hard to do that when things go wrong. When things go wrong for me, I have to ask myself, *How should I handle this?* Instead of becoming discouraged, I need to remember that “all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28). When something goes wrong, I need to keep the perspective that God wants me to learn lessons from whatever the circumstance may be. And because we are learning, we are told to “count it *all joy* when you fall into various trials” (James 1:2). Not that the trial itself is joyous, but that we can use it to come closer to the truth.

We must not let disappointment make us cynical, turning us into scoffers. We read, “A scoffer seeks wisdom and does not find it, but knowledge is easy to him who understands” (Proverbs 14:6). If we know the truth, we can rejoice in the truth. But do we really appreciate the truth as deeply as we should, or do we just take it for granted? Do we really thank God, acknowledge Him, and rejoice in the truth?

Notice what the Apostle John wrote: “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 1:2–4). John rejoiced greatly upon hearing that those he taught were walking in the truth. Are we causing others to rejoice by our walk in the truth?

Stand Up for the Truth

Most of us live in places where we have relative freedom to live the truth and even to preach the truth. But even in the best of circumstances, sometimes there are challenges. Maybe it’s a work environment, or a school environment, or with your extended family. Even if only in a smaller way many of us have had to stand up for the truth. We’ve had to have the wisdom to be wise as serpents, yet harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16).

We read of Peter pleading before the Sanhedrin: “But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done” (Acts 4:19–21). Even after being brought back to the Sanhedrin and beaten, they continued to stand up for the truth (Acts 5:40). They went back to their brethren rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.

So, will we be able to stand up for the truth? First, of course, we need to prove the truth. “Test all things; hold fast

When you involve yourself in some activity so closely and intently you barely think about or notice what else is going on around you, you are immersed in that activity. Maybe it’s a game of chess, or a challenging puzzle, or a deeply introspective meditation on something you’ve read in the Bible.

what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). What is a solid part of our truth, our character—what we really know, as far as the truth of the Bible is concerned? Are we going to be able to stand up for it?

Standing in the gap is a major principle. We, as God’s people, have a responsibility to stand up for the truth and continue warning the whole world:

“The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger. So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,” says the Lord GOD (Ezekiel 22:29–31).

Brethren, God wants us, as His people, to stand in the gap. He wants us to stand up for His commandments, His way of life, His righteousness, and His truth. We need to stand up for the truth and build a wall of righteousness against oppression, wickedness, and evil.

Speak the Truth

With so much conflict and division in our nations’ political and social lives, it may seem that nobody is speaking the truth. God wants us to speak the truth, but He adds another vital qualifier: He wants us to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Our words define our character. Parents correct their children, and should do so in love. Employers correct their employees at times, and are to do so not in hate, but in love. This is part of our growing up in Christ, not being as children (vv. 14–15).

The Ninth Commandment instructs us, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16). We also read, “He who speaks truth declares righteousness, but a false witness, deceit” (Proverbs 12:17). The Bible is filled with instructions on the use of speech and words. “If you have been foolish in exalting yourself, or if you have devised evil, put your hand on your mouth” (Proverbs 30:32).

That’s an expression, but maybe we have actually put our hands on our mouths to keep from saying something inappropriate. I think of these words of King David: “LORD, I cry out to You; make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You. Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:1–3).

When I pray, even daily, I ask God to help me to speak that which is edifying and administers grace to the hearers—and I ask God to help me not to say things that I should not say, because once it’s out, “the horse is out of the barn,” as the saying goes.

Every so often, we sing the hymn “Who Shall Dwell on Thy Holy Hill?” It’s based on Psalm 15, where King David asks, “LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart” (vv. 1–2). David goes on to explain that these truth-speakers dwelling with God will not backbite, will not do evil to neighbors, and will honor those who fear the Lord (vv. 3–4). Does this describe us? It should.

Obey the Truth

We must believe the truth. Believing in God the Father and Jesus Christ is the foundation of our lives. “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:14–15). But belief alone is not enough. “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19). As Christians, we must also obey the truth we have been given!

Sadly, Scripture shows that there will be those who will not obey the truth. Paul tells us of those who are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). And he tells us that there are “those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth” (Romans 2:8).

We are living in a day and age when the Bible warns that many will not obey the truth. “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” (Galatians 3:1-3).

Later on, Paul writes, “You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you” (Galatians 5:7-8). And this is one of my favorite verses: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:6-7).

The Galatians had been deceived into not obeying the truth, and we see that the world around us is not doing so, either. We need to make sure that we are knowing the truth, proving it, living it, and obeying it. “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:22-23). The word translated “born” should be translated “begotten,” of course. As we yield to the Holy Spirit within us, we gain the power we need to grow ever closer toward the full obedience God desires of us.

Men and Women of Truth

We know that our God is a God of truth. His word is truth, and he is “a God of truth and without injustice” (Deuteronomy 32:4). Without truth, we cannot have true justice. God expected the Israelites to administer justice truthfully. “Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens” (Exodus 18:21).

Would God recognize us as men or women of truth? We should all be striving to overcome our carnal human nature. We aren’t perfect yet, but we should be actively engaged in a transformation toward truth.

How would we describe our nature? King David described human nature, and the transformation of that nature that God wants us to achieve: “Behold, I was brought

forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:5-7).

Truth must reach our inward parts. It must become an indelible part of our character. And we know that God’s Church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). God leads each of us toward His truth perfectly, but we sometimes don’t listen or obey Him perfectly, and we make mistakes as a result. We aren’t robots; God is working with us to perfect us, and He doesn’t give up on us as long as we are sincerely striving to obey Him.

Even the Church as a whole may sometimes make a mistake, but God works with His obedient human leadership, providing guidance and correction as needed to keep the Church on track. Mr. Herbert Armstrong saw the Worldwide Church of God drifting into error, and before he died in January of 1986, he made great strides to put the WCG “back on track.”

When his successor ceased to obey the truth and started teaching others to disobey, God used His obedient servant Dr. Roderick C. Meredith, mistakes and all, to powerfully continue the proclamation of His truth. That you are reading this article today is a testimony to Dr. Meredith’s zeal and dedication to preserving and preaching the truth. And you can read our *Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs* and see for yourself that we as a Church are dedicated to proclaiming and obeying the truth—the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Full Immersion

Brethren, when we are baptized, we are immersed fully under the water. That symbolizes the death of our old carnal nature and the beginning of a new spiritual nature begotten in us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our symbolic immersion should not end at baptism. We’ve been begotten by the word of truth and the Spirit of truth.

“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). That has been my prayer many times—to ask God to teach me and to lead me in His truth.

May we all, as brethren, shine as the light of truth in a very dark and evil world. May we internalize the truth, clothe ourselves with the truth, believe and obey the truth, love the truth, live the truth—so that we can teach the world the reality and the truth of God in the Kingdom to come.

Let’s immerse ourselves in the truth—today, tomorrow, and forever. (LW)



Feast of Tabernacles 2023: Building Bonds of Brotherhood

By **Rod McNair**

Who did you meet for the first time this year at the Feast? With whom did you deepen a friendship that you already had? The primary reason for going to the Feast is to fulfill God's command found in Deuteronomy 16: "You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress.... Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands" (vv. 13, 15). But keeping the Feast also gives us a great opportunity to build relationships. It's a special time of the year when we can spend eight whole days with one another as brethren. And our relationships can be deepened and broadened if we take full advantage of this opportunity.

So, how do we do that? How did we do it this year? As we relive the memories from Festival 2023, let's examine the ways it helped us build bonds of brotherhood—and how we can strengthen those bonds in the future.

Worshipping Together

In 2023, the Living Church of God conducted 93 Feast sites in 51 countries. Sixteen sites were in the United States, and 77 were outside the U.S., with an overall attendance of 11,366. God's people around the world had the opportunity to come before God in peace and safety to glorify Him together.

When asked what was one of the best activities for helping brethren grow in unity and harmony, **St. Augustine, Florida**, Feast site coordinator James Sweat replied, "Just going to services!" And that is true. Think about it: When we attend daily services, we are participating in the largest "group activity" the Church organizes during the Feast, and we are following scriptural guidelines exactly. As Moses instructed the Israelites, "Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 31:12). When we participate in worship services—listening, learning, studying the Bible, taking notes, and singing

hymns together—we are functioning as the body of Christ. We are coming before our King together, as one body with one Spirit (Ephesians 4:4), and real unity ultimately comes from the Spirit of God in us all (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Together, as many members, we all comprise the body of Christ. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:12, "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ." The most important activity at the Feast is presenting ourselves before God to learn His way of life—and that's true whether we are feasting near the lush waters and trees of **Cavan, Ireland**, beside a large and peaceful lake in **Taupo, New Zealand**, or enjoying the sight of a beautiful, calm sea in **Penang, Malaysia**. It's true whether we are enjoying God's creation amongst the garden fruit trees in **Parika, Guyana**, taking in the scenery of the "18 mountains" region of **Man, Côte d'Ivoire**, or keeping the Feast beside the coconut trees and wide beach in **Sorsogon, Philippines**.

On a more sobering note, God's protection was evident in giving brethren safety and peace in **Kalaymyo and Myaungmya** amidst a civil war in Myanmar, granting brethren in **Haiti** safety and security while attending the Feast in their local Sabbath halls, and granting Guatemalan brethren protection when they were delayed by blockades as they returned home from **Cortés, Honduras**. Wherever and however we go, the priorities are always the same: We are there to learn God's way of life. And in the process, as we experience the Feast in these surroundings, we have the opportunity to be transformed by God (Romans 12:2).

We are still living through the shockwaves of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in nations hit particularly hard. In **Mur-de-Bretagne**, Coordinator Adrian Kaefer noted that "many brethren expressed appreciation for being all together [in continental Europe] after the years of separation due to COVID restrictions." In **Liverpool, Nova Scotia, Canada**, coordinator Shane Kruse also noted, "This was a wonderful Feast this year. It is the first year since COVID where brethren were able to really get to know one another and converse freely leading to spiritual growth."

The pandemic also brought unexpected blessings, such as the development of streaming capabilities that continue

to benefit the Church today, especially in remote areas or sites lacking manpower. Some Feast sites were able to share live services, such as **Drummondville, Quebec, Canada**, streaming to brethren in the **French Caribbean—Guyana, Haiti, and the Marquesas Islands** of the South Pacific. French-language services were also streamed from **Mûr-de-Bretagne, France** to sites across French-speaking Africa, including **Porto-Novo, Benin**. Spanish-language Feast services from **San Miguel de Allende, Mexico**, were streamed to **Samaipata, Bolivia; Villa Carlos Paz, Argentina; Cortés, Honduras; and Guatemala**. Services from **Harrogate, United Kingdom**, were streamed to scattered members in Europe, and the small Feast site in **Ghana**. Services from Australia were streamed to sites including **Mangalore, India**.

Feast services were also made available to brethren unable to attend in person for health or other reasons. This has been a great encouragement to those in this challenging situation. One Feast-goer, regarding the **Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri**, Feast site, wrote, “I was unable to attend the feast.... Viewing the fellowship online caused me to pray for the members of LCG attending to unite with one another.” So, the Feast of Tabernacles 2023 was a time of growing in bonds of brotherhood, just from the fact that we were communing with God together, in worship of Him.

Fellowshipping Together

The Apostle John wrote that what “we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). When we arrive at the Church hall before services—on the Sabbath or at the Feast—and greet one another with a smile, we are adding to the morale and camaraderie of the group. When we greet unfamiliar brethren at the Feast, and perhaps ask them where they are from and what congregation they attend, we’re taking the first step in expanding our friendship base. We’re reaching out to one another. We’re expressing the desire to get to know them, and as we do that, the bonds of brotherhood begin to grow.

We cannot overestimate the importance of just being friendly and cheerful as we get to know one another at services. One Feast-goer from the **Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri**, site noted how much he was impressed by “the way the ladies and the gentlemen come right up and shake your hand and introduce themselves and say hi. From day one I felt like I belonged and was appreciated. Because of my job (truck driver) that was deeply appreciated and needed. It felt like the Kingdom was already here.” Clearly, it meant a lot to him! As we care for one another and get to know one another, we are becoming one body. Paul explains in Ephesians 4:16 that as “every part does its share,” it “causes growth of the body

for the edifying of itself in love.” We all have a part to play in fellowship, contributing to the growth of the body.

What encourages fellowship? Refreshments! That may sound overly simplistic, but it’s true. Some Feast sites, such as **Arroyo Grande, California**, utilized a hospitality corner with coffee and snacks to provide an incentive for Feast-goers to arrive early and stay late. Speaking of his site’s hospitality corner, **Rockport-Fulton** coordinator Jonathan Bueno explained, “Our hospitality corner, which was an expanded tea, coffee and snack service, really facilitated fellowship before services.... [People spent] some extra time fellowshiping to the backdrop of the Aransas Bay right out of the windows of the meeting room.” In **Stillbaai, South Africa**, a similar station was set up for one hour before and after services. Note what one of the members said: “The tea station really had an amazing effect on us bonding with each other before and after church. It made everyone feel included, and interaction so much easier.”

Even something as mundane as the seating arrangement in the meeting hall can have an effect on fellowship. One result of the COVID pandemic was the pattern some Feast sites have adopted of letting brethren sit in the same seats for the entire Feast. Since then, some coordinators have continued this practice, with notably positive results. Many brethren commented on how much they got to know the people around them—because they saw them day after day. As one member from **Pigeon Forge, Tennessee**, mentioned, “The assigned seating at the Pigeon Forge location allowed us to see the same people every day and build bonds with those we were around.” Eating, drinking, and sitting together lead to growing stronger connections together.

Serving Together

Every year, we are all heartily encouraged to serve at the Feast. The needs are many, and it’s a wonderful way to get involved and help others. What shouldn’t come as a surprise is how much it can help us build friendships. Whether it’s singing in the choir, crafting flower arrangements, or helping the elderly disembark from their cars, serving gives us an opportunity to establish connections with and learn about others at the Feast. As **Kimberley, British Columbia, Canada**, coordinator Barry Walker noted, God’s Spirit was evident at the Feast in so many brethren’s willingness to serve and help others in need.

Where did you serve this year? What friendships did you develop as a result of it? How did it impact your relationships? **New Bern, North Carolina**, coordinator Wyatt Ciesielka had a “car-to-seat” plan of helping the elderly who needed assistance walking, making sure they had someone by their side from the parking lot all the way into the meeting hall. It was gratefully appreciated by those who were served. But it’s not just those we serve to whom we grow closer—we

also grow closer to those we serve “next to.” One Feast-goer from **Fontana, Wisconsin**, said that one positive effect of this year’s Feast was “being a greeter with someone from a different Church area and getting to know each other.” Another member from **Florence, Oregon**, added, “Working and serving together helps to build bonds between brethren and you can do that at all Feast sites.”

Stillbaai, South Africa, coordinator Lawdi Ferreira explained, “One of the most striking aspects [of the Feast in 2023] was the genuine love, care, and unity that prevailed among all the members. The unwavering commitment to serving each other and the remarkable spirit of teamwork stood out prominently. As one member mentioned, ‘The serving attitude among the brethren is contagious and it automatically causes you to want to serve and help where needed.’ This inclusivity extended even to the young children, who actively participated as junior greeters, assisting the elderly by carrying their belongings and welcoming them with cheerful smiles and affectionate hugs at the entrance every morning.”

When we work on a team for a greater good, we have the satisfaction of working shoulder to shoulder with others of like mind. We get to meet people that we would otherwise not meet. And the act of giving to others is extremely fulfilling. We feel part of a team. Why? Because we are fulfilling Paul’s instruction in Philippians 2:4: “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” Looking out for and serving with one another builds friendships and connections.

Joining in Activities Together

When we go to the Feast, we have more time to be together than any other season of the year. We can spend an abundance of quality time in the relaxed atmosphere of planned—and informal—activities. Who did you meet this year through the Feast activities you participated in?

When God commands us to rejoice at the Feast, He mentions eating and drinking: “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 14:26). But we are not to just rejoice by ourselves, off in a corner, in isolation. In Nehemiah’s day, this is how the instruction was given during the Fall Holy Day season: “Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared” (Nehemiah 8:10). In other words, the Feast is a time to share our resources, our time, and ourselves with our fellow brothers and sisters. That builds bonds of brotherhood.

Why does the Church organize activities at the Feast? Is it because the Feast Coordinators aren’t busy enough—that they have too much free time on their hands? Of course

not—nor is a Feast Coordinator to be a sort of “Cruise Director” whose sole responsibility is to provide non-stop entertainment and recreation for attendees. That’s not the purpose of Feast activities! Mr. Gerald Weston, Presiding Evangelist of the Living Church of God, has encouraged us in recent years to avoid having activities “just to have activities.” We don’t have certain activities “just because we always have.” There needs to be a purpose, and that purpose needs to align with God’s values and His purposes for calling us to be there in the first place. Likewise, Dr. Douglas Winnail, Director of Church Administration, has encouraged us to leave “white space” on the calendar, so to speak, so members have time to plan their own get-togethers and schedule their own group outings. He has encouraged us to take time to walk along the ocean (if we’re near an ocean), take a short hike (if we’re in the mountains), and to look up at the stars in the evening and *think*. We are at the Feast to reinvigorate our desire for God’s kingdom. Rushing around frantically for eight days, and then collapsing, exhausted, does not accomplish that purpose.

Accordingly, our Feast Coordinators have tried very hard to find a balance of good, wholesome, inexpensive activities that bring the maximum number of people together. And again, why are we trying to bring God’s people together at the Feast? *To build bonds of brotherhood*—to encourage the formation of strong, personal connections as we build memories together.

With that in mind, here is a taste of some of the organized activities that went on at this year’s Feast. As you read, think about the activities you enjoyed at the site you attended, and ask yourself how they helped you grow stronger and deeper personal connections with other brethren.

Kicking off the Feast

Many of our Feast Coordinators provided hospitality mixers early in the Feast. On the second day of the Feast, **Pigeon Forge, Tennessee**, also hosted a “Meet & Greet” reception after services. Coordinator Ron Poole explains, “We had five food and drink tables sponsored by congregations from the five pastorates assigned to the site. It lasted about two hours and was attended by the majority of those at the Feast, and was intended to provide an opportunity to get to meet new brethren.”

Mr. Alex Celan, Feast Coordinator at **Hilton Head Island, South Carolina**, also scheduled a large, general event early in the Feast: “We had a family evening dolphin cruise. Singles and families enjoyed the natural beauty of the South Carolina coast and marshlands. Since this was an event early in the Feast, the brethren had the opportunity to build relationships and make plans for other activities during the rest of the feast.”

Progressive Fellowship Activity

Several sites in the United States, including **Rockport-Fulton, Texas**, held a “Progressive Fellowship Activity” early in the Feast. For this activity, different courses of a meal are prepared by brethren who volunteer to open up their homes as hosts. Then, those who sign up to be participants are assigned host homes to visit, at a set schedule, for each of the three courses of the meal. At each course they interact with a different small group of other brethren. Thus, within a short period of time—several hours—they are able to break bread with and fellowship with a large number of brethren, many of whom they didn’t know.

Regarding the Progressive Fellowship Activity held in **Poconos, Pennsylvania**, coordinator Michael Aviles explained, “The primary benefit of the Progressive Fellowship Activity is that it mixes and matches the members where they get to meet and talk with others they may not have had the opportunity of sitting with otherwise.” Where Progressive Fellowship Activities have been tried, they often become among the best-attended and favorite activities, as mentioned by one of the **Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri**, members who participated in that site’s activity: “Whenever I’ve had the opportunity to participate in a Progressive Fellowship Dinner during the Feast, it’s always been the very best way to get to know one another. We not only meet with three different groups of people—we get to spend time with, eat with, and get to know one another. The very best part is that at services the next day, we have a whole new group of friends to greet.”

Bunco and Bingo

Many Feast sites, including **Williamsburg, Virginia** and **Warrnambool, Victoria, Australia**, were filled with many laughs and fun for Feast-goers of all ages. A game played at some sites was “Bunco,” a dice game involving groups of four, sitting at tables, where after each round two people move to a new table. Thus, within a short period of time, even in a large crowd, everyone can interact with many different people. In **Fontana, Wisconsin**, coordinator Bob Rodzaj explained, “It’s a great mixer game for all ages. It’s easy to learn and fun to play.” In **Hilton Head, South Carolina**, coordinator Alex Celan noted, “Early in the Feast we held a very enjoyable mixer for singles and young married couples where everyone played Bunco. This provided opportunities to meet many different people as it required many people to move from table to table.”

Bingo was another game played at the Feast with large groups of people. **St. George, Utah**, coordinator Steve Elliott reported, “The Bingo Night activity was another big hit with a full banquet hall of participants.... The members brought novelty gifts for the winners.” **Branson, Missouri**, coordina-

tor Shannon Christal noted, “The Bingo night was a huge hit, because everyone stayed together and had a great time. Over two hundred brethren participated.”

Bible Games

Bible games were also enjoyed by brethren at Feast sites all over the world. In **Bon Accord, Tobago; Pebbles Beach, Barbados; and Montego Bay, Jamaica**, brethren were treated to an evening of “Bible Bowl.” In **Orap, Vanuatu, and Porto-Novo, Benin**, brethren participated in Bible games. And in **Drummondville, Quebec, Canada**, the Bible game “On The Road to the Kingdom” consisted of a series of questions from Psalms and Proverbs that people, in teams of eight, had to answer in a certain order to complete a verse of Scripture. Here is the comment from the **Batu, Indonesia**, Feast site by coordinator Firman Bramantyo Yohannes concerning their Bible game night: “The Bible game this year was so engaging for teenagers and kids. We purposely made it different this time to lower the gap of the biblical knowledge of the older generation and the younger generation. We wanted the younger generation to enjoy and develop interest in knowing and learning God’s words.”

Are games so trivial as to be of no value at the Feast? Absolutely not. As **Russell, Manitoba, Canada** coordinator Michael Brown noted, “The games at the lodge really brought people together and were especially helpful at helping the youth break the ice with one another and build friendships. Something as simple as games—of all sorts—can be a wonderful tool in bringing brethren closer together.”

Picnics and Dances

The Bible gives an encouraging and inspiring picture of the future under the reign of Jesus Christ. Instead of war, there will be peace. Instead of strife, there will be tranquility. Scripture describes that world as a time when “old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem.... The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets” (Zechariah 8:4–5). Similarly, when we have picnics and outings at the Feast, we’re mirroring the peaceful outings and fellowship that will occur in the Millennium.

Accordingly, in 2023, many Feast sites planned picnics and outings for Feast-goers. A picnic in the park in **Boerne, Texas**, featured a Texas favorite—smoked brisket and chicken—while 107 brethren in **Natchez, Mississippi**, enjoyed hamburgers and hot dogs at the Duncan Park family day. Family day picnics were also held in **Busselton, Western Australia**, and **Hervey Bay, Queensland, Australia**. Hervey Bay coordinator Martin Montgomery noted that “On the family day an ice cream van attended the park we were using. Two ladies paid for everyone.... The ice cream vendor said, ‘Who are you people? You’re all so polite and patient.’”

In **Bela-Bela, South Africa**, a family day “braai,” or barbeque, was held, with lots of fellowship under shady trees. In **St. Luce, Martinique**, coordinator Etienne Duval reported that they had “*méchoui* (North African style barbecue lamb) with three lambs prepared by members [and] grilled on roasting spits.” In **Flic-en-Flac, Mauritius**, off the South African coast, coordinator Rees Ellis noted, “We were invited by a prospective member for a BBQ picnic after a short boat ride in a typical Mauritian lagoon. Old-time members renewed friendships and made new ones. A highlight was the baptism of a couple at sunset in the Indian ocean. They are our first two LCG members from Madagascar! They had been following the truth for some years and pulled out all the stops to attend the Feast.”

Scripture describes celebrations that will take place in the Millennium. Will dancing be a part of that future? “Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old, together; for I will turn their mourning to joy, will comfort them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow” (Jeremiah 31:13). In 2023, Feast sites held a variety of dances to reflect the wholesome fun and entertainment that will be found under Christ’s rule. In **San Miguel de Allende, Mexico**, a formal dinner dance was held, complete with a mariachi band and a glass dome to view the stars above. In **Aguadilla, Puerto Rico**, a dance with a local cultural theme was organized. According to coordinator Raul Colón, “Even the employees of the hotel serving food and drinks to us were dancing and singing.” **New Bern, North Carolina**, held an ice cream social and Western-themed dance. In **Mt. Moriah, Malaybalay, Philippines**, some brethren took a dance class

in their free time. In **Harrogate, United Kingdom**, a “Ceilidh Dance” was held, described by coordinator Simon Roberts as “good, wholesome fun for everyone. Participants not only learnt their left hand from their right hand but also how to have genuine joy together, as we gathered to foreshadow the future Kingdom of God.”

The Feast is not only about activities. We go to the Feast to worship God, have fellowship with brethren, and learn to serve—all of which help us grow in the bonds of brotherhood we share with one another. Still, activities are not unimportant; the right mix of Feast activities can enhance and extend our fellowship in a powerful and meaningful way. And when we make it a priority to deepen our relationships with other brethren, the Feast can be a life-changing experience.

God’s Feast of Tabernacles can truly become the highlight of the year, because we yearn to be with our family. When we consider our destiny, the importance of being together with our spiritual brothers and sisters cannot be overstated. We are becoming part of the family—God’s family. Everyone is important, and we need to get to know each other. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:14–15, “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.”

Coordinator Mike Heykoop of **Leamington, Ontario, Canada**, said that, in 2023, “there seemed to be an atmosphere of joy and contentment in keeping the Feast together. I have never had more people comment to me on how uplifting of a feast it had been.” Savor your memories of building bonds of brotherhood in 2023—and prepare to strengthen those bonds in 2024. (LN)



Mangalore, India



Batu and Malang, Indonesia



Berne, Texas



Myaungmya-Irrawaddy, Burma



Kalaymyo-Chin, Burma



Bon Accord, Trinidad and Tobago



Poconos, Pennsylvania



Parika, Guyana



Fontana, Wisconsin



Drummondville, Canada



Liverpool, Canada

WHAT IS THE FALLING AWAY? continued from page 2

us that “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.” Whatever he is talking about, it was already at work in his day. Jude also confirms this first-century falling away from truth:

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 3–4).

Jesus warned against those who claim His authority—who even admit that He is the Christ—but deceive many (Matthew 24:4–5; cf. Revelation 6:1–2). Revelation reveals that there is a great apostate mother church with harlot daughters. This falling away from truth did not happen all at once, but—as Paul and Jude indicate—this rebellion against the truth began in their day. Early church history, as Dr. Meredith showed in *Restoring Original Christianity* and *Satan’s Counterfeit Christianity*, took a catastrophic turn away from the Christianity of Christ, His apostles, and the early Church. This was an apostasy of gargantuan proportions—a deception now comprising the world’s largest religion. Today’s mainstream Christianity, in all its forms, was, and continues to be, a *massive* departure from truth.

When Paul wrote that the mystery of lawlessness was already at work, he pointed to the origin of the falling away—and to the source from which the man of sin would arise. That falling away began early, as Jesse Lyman Hurlbut and many other historians point out. “For fifty years after St. Paul’s life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A.D. with the writings of the earliest church-fathers, we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul” (Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, *The Story of the Christian Church*, 1933, p. 41).

A Latter-Day Fulfillment

As God’s Church has long taught, one of the keys to understanding prophecy is to recognize prophetic gaps in time. The rebellion against the truth set in early and took time to fully develop. As it did, the bishop of Rome took on titles reserved for God. From a preserved entry in the original *Catholic Encyclopedia*, we read of one of these titles: “Vicar of Christ (Lat. Vicarius Christi), a title of the pope implying his supreme and universal primacy, both of honor and of jurisdiction, over the Church of Christ” (“Vicar of Christ,” Catholic Answers, *Catholic.com*). Rome’s bishop is considered the head of that church, but the Bible tells us it is the living Christ who is the Head of His Church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22–23). That difference is profound! Roman Catholic prelates are called Holy, Father, and Reverend. But while Scripture tells us that we are to be holy (1 Peter 1:15–16), it never uses that term as a title. Paul called himself a father to converts (1 Thessalonians 2:11), but never in the context of a title. We are to conduct ourselves in a reverent manner (Titus 2:2–3), but only God is “reverend” (Psalm 111:9, *King James Version*).

Jesus strongly warned against arrogating titles to ourselves (Matthew 23:7–10). He warned against the misuse of “father” (v. 9). He did not forbid us to use that term with our physical father, our father-in-law, or our foster father, but we are not to use it as a religious title. And even in some Protestant circles we find men calling themselves “Venerable” and “Most Right Reverend.”

While the great rebellion and apostasy set in as far back as the first century AD, there is also a latter-day fulfillment that is yet ahead. It is clear that the prophesied man of sin will not appear until shortly before Christ’s return. This final head of a satanic system, one that has made the world drunk with the wine of its fornication, will take to a *new* level the claim of divine status. When we read of how he will perform signs, wonders, and deceptive miracles, this is not hard to understand. The world will *worship* this man.

Fullness of Iniquity

The mystery of iniquity was already at work in the first century, and Paul’s reference indicates its connection to the falling away. But what we see today may not be what we see tomorrow.

Will there be a pushback against what we see being promoted today? Will the man of sin continue the “woke agenda,” or will he turn people back toward a more traditional false god? Only time will tell. But we know that masses of humanity will be moved by the miracles he performs, and history shows how quickly human beings can shift their allegiances. There will be a religious revival—but not back to the God of the Bible.

Timing is everything with God. He told Abram that “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Genesis 15:16). We again see God’s patience when we read of “the latter time of their kingdom, *when the transgressors have reached their fullness*” (Daniel 8:23).

God has given the Israelite nations time to change, sending wake-up calls along the way. We saw two world wars in the twentieth century. Yes, the Israelitish nations won those wars at a great price, but it was not because of their righteousness. They also suffered through the Great Depression, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, two Gulf Wars, and the 9/11 terrorist attack. Judah has also faced ongoing wars and troubles—always coming out on top, so far, but is this because they are a righteous people, or because of God’s overall plan?

The world is coming to the fullness of iniquity as it rebels against its Creator. Our nations won their past battles not because they were righteous, but despite their sins. Is this not what God tells us through the book of Jeremiah? When the prophet asked why so many troubles came upon the nation, God answered, “Because your fathers have forsaken Me... they have walked after other gods and have served them and worshiped them, and have forsaken Me and not kept My law. *And you have done worse than your fathers*, for behold, each one follows the dictates of his own evil heart, so that no one listens to Me” (Jeremiah 16:11–12).

We must not confuse the prophesied falling away from truth with mankind’s prophesied coming to the fullness of iniquity—the time when God will intervene powerfully to stop our madness. Both are important, but they are not the same. When Paul wrote of the “falling away,” he wrote prophetically of the apostasy that false Christianity represents. That false Christianity will grow in power, eventually culminating in global, end-time persecution for true Christians and led by the “man of sin,” whom Christ will personally destroy at His return (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

Some of what Paul wrote is not easy to understand. There are questions left unanswered for now. We do our best, with God’s guidance, to understand—but we must be ready to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). Time will reveal the answers to all our questions, but the big picture is available to all who have eyes to see and ears to hear.





TITUS 2:3-5

Woman to Woman

“The Wise Woman Builds Her House”

By **Janth B. English**

Recently, I was watching *Father Knows Best*, a 1950s sitcom. The backdrop is a suburban family with a mother who is a full-time homemaker, three children who are mostly obedient, and a sometimes-bumbling but ultimately wise father who is at the center of the household offering sage advice and guiding the family through situations that arise. (You can imagine that no TV show produced today would portray this type of family.)

One episode really caught my attention. The mother was busy clearing the table after their family breakfast when her teenage daughter brought her a dress to be hemmed. Then her teen son wanted his corduroy pants washed and pressed for an event that evening. Before leaving, her husband asked that his suitcoat button be sewed on and the suit taken to the cleaners. Finally, her youngest child asked her to catch some flies or other insects and feed them to her frog. And there was still a sink full of dishes from a homemade pancake breakfast! Needless to say, the mother was overwhelmed, so she decided instead to go shopping and buy herself a new hat. I could totally identify with this character!

I believe that most women, at some point in their lives, have found themselves feeling overwhelmed and underappreciated. It can sometimes make us feel despondent and want to fight back in ways that are counterproductive to healthy and happy families and relationships. In these situations, we can become moody and non-responsive—which does not help the situation, but instead complicates the matter. It is at these times that I am reminded of Proverbs 14:1: “The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands.” How a woman responds when she feels unappreciated makes the difference between building her house and tearing it down. In this article, we will focus on some helpful things we can do to build our families in these circumstances.

Clear Communication: A Foundation of Family Function

In that episode of *Father Knows Best*, the mother had failed to communicate her feelings to the family, so they were shocked

to find dirty breakfast dishes still in the sink and no dinner cooked when they returned home. Believe it or not, your family may be unaware that you feel overwhelmed or unappreciated. We have a responsibility to let our families know what we are feeling, but we must do so in a positive way. Negative communications such as yelling, nagging, complaining, going “on strike,” or sulking will not solve the underlying problems. The Bible advises women against such contentious behavior (Proverbs 21:9). The truth is, when negative communications become the default mode, those around us will most likely not listen to what we say. We will become more frustrated, and our family will not be the happy one we desire. *What* we say, *how* we say it, and *when* we say it are very important.

The time for discussion is not when we are already upset. Plan a time with your family to sit down together and discuss the matter. Think about what it is you want to say and have a few examples to support your position. Be sure to express how these concerns have affected you. Ask for ideas to remedy the problems, and suggest a possible plan of action, such as a household chore schedule. Communicating with the family and getting them involved in a solution will lead to more cohesion as a unit and to strengthening family ties—building your house.

Many chores must be done in a home, but you do not have to be the one to do them all. I can recall so well the time I freed myself from trying to be “superwoman.” I had to admit that I could not do everything by myself: No one can do everything. Having such expectations is unrealistic and can lead to resentment and, perhaps, even ill health. When Moses was overwhelmed by his responsibilities, his father-in-law advised him to delegate (Exodus 18:17–23). Women can learn from this wise advice. All members of the family should have household responsibilities that are commensurate with their age. Even young children can be taught to put away their toys and place their dirty clothes in the laundry hamper. Certainly, a 16-year-old should be able to hem her own dress, which is exactly what the sitcom father instructed her to do once he realized there was a problem.

I found that making a list of chores and assigning responsibilities worked well and settled family disputes about who was to do what. There may be a little resistance, as some would rather do anything else—so would we all. However, there is much value in our children practicing life skills that

will be needed when they have a home of their own. Delegating chores is a sound way of easing your burden while giving family members an opportunity to learn responsibility and accountability—building your house.

Preparing a Household

Before chores can be delegated, we must be sure that our children know how to perform them. The Bible puts a great deal of importance on rearing and teaching our children (Deuteronomy 6:6–7). While spiritual training and good manners are most important, we cannot neglect to teach them practical, everyday things such as how to sweep, mop, vacuum, cook, make the bed, mow the lawn—you get the point.

The teenage daughter in the episode had already been taught how to hem her skirt and cook dinner for her siblings, so when she was told to do so, she was able. I know from experience that it is often easier just to do the chore yourself. Teaching takes time and patience, but having children who can handle responsibilities is well worth it in the end. Take advan-

There is an adage that states, “A man can work from sun to sun, but a woman’s work is never done.” There are disputes as to who said it originally, and I’m not sure about a man’s work, but there does seem to be no end to the work that needs to be done around the home. **I had to learn that there will always be more to do than I can get done if I want to live a normal life.**

tage of your children’s curiosity and desire to learn. Let them help you as you instruct them in the proper way to carry out the task. Try to teach them in a positive and encouraging way so that they will want to do it again. Consider the age of each child when you look at the finished product, and commend or correct accordingly. Help your children to practice the biblical principle of doing their best at whatever they attempt (Ecclesiastes 9:10). When you teach your children to do even the simple things well, you are instilling in them lifelong habits that will serve them well (Proverbs 22:6)—building your house.

The Value of a Routine—and a Break

There is an adage that states, “A man can work from sun to sun, but a woman’s work is never done.” There are disputes as to who said it originally, and I’m not sure about a man’s work, but there does seem to be no end to the work that needs to be done around the home. I had to learn that there will always be more to do than I can get done if I want to live a normal life. The key here is to prioritize: I make a list, even if it is a mental one, of

things that need to be accomplished that day. Certainly, catching flies to feed a frog would never have made the list.

Try not to be too rigid, as household priorities may change when different scenarios come along—life happens. Be sure not to neglect Bible study and prayer; they should be top priorities on your list (Matthew 6:33)! Your personal relationship with God is the most important one you have. You have the privilege of rearing future members of God’s family, and you cannot do so without His help. When you prioritize the events in your life, you can choose to emphasize the most important ones, including maintaining a close, personal relationship with God—building your house.

Sometimes, when we perform the same tasks over and over or when we feel overwhelmed by those tasks, we can feel like we are stuck in a rut. Everyone needs a diversion, a “release valve,” from time to time. The mother in the story went shopping, but I do not recommend shopping as a diversion; that could create new problems. However, a rest from the normal routine is a good idea. You can learn a new skill, read a book, or develop a hobby. I can relate to those who feel they don’t have time for that, but the key is to schedule your time. Put your diversion time on your list of things to do—and do it.

When I worked outside the home, I had a lunch break and two 15-minute breaks, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Industry discovered long ago that taking a break from work is a good thing. Doing something different from the normal routine can recharge your batteries. Your new activities can help with your relationships in that you will have different and more interesting things to share. Taking a break from your normal activities and developing new interests can help you be a better wife and mother—building your house.

Making All Things Work Together

Christian women are not immune to feeling overwhelmed or underappreciated. What we do when this happens is key to overcoming these feelings: If you find yourself in this situation, you can talk things over with your family and make plans to share the responsibilities as you teach your children how to perform household tasks. Accept that not everything can be done immediately, and prioritize what needs to be done—always making prayer and Bible study a top priority. And don’t forget to take a break from your normal activities from time to time to cultivate your interests.

Communicating, delegating, teaching, prioritizing, and developing new interests—these are a few ways a wise woman can build her house. (L)

In Loving Memory

Mr. Cyril Banfield, 86, of the Victoria, British Columbia, congregation in Canada, died on April 29 after stoically struggling with illness for many months. Mr. Banfield was a hard worker at a local supermarket until his declining health precluded it. He was a member of God's Church for ten years and his obvious determination to be at services and the Feast of Tabernacles was a fine example. He will be greatly missed.

Mr. Steve Bianchi, 73, finished his race on September 1. Mr. Bianchi was baptized in 1976 by Dr. Douglas Winnail and was a dedicated and active member of the local congregation, helping with the audio equipment, participating in Spokesman Club, and taking part in local activities. He had a fine, mellifluous voice and worked for over 40 years as a radio announcer. Mr. Bianchi was a loyal husband to his wife, Betsy, and a good friend to the brethren. He will be sorely missed by the Pawtucket, Rhode Island, congregation and all others who knew him.

Mr. Harold Bussey, 88, of the Springdale, Newfoundland, congregation in Canada, died on November 23. He was a longtime member of God's Church, baptized in 1975. Mr. Bussey was a hard worker who loved to help the brethren whenever he had the opportunity, and no one went without when he was around. Because the brethren were scattered around the island, the Bussey household hosted many Holy Day get-togethers. Many have fond memories of those occasions and still reminisce about them. Mr. Bussey will be sadly missed by his lovely wife, Melvina, as well as his five children, eleven grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and all others who knew him.

Mr. Alfred "Al" Chaffee, 99, died peacefully on August 4, with family at his side. Born in Massachusetts, Mr. Chaffee was an accomplished woodworker and made wonderfully realistic model ships, many of them built in bottles. He also had aviation mechanics training and worked at various civilian aviation and millwright jobs. He married his wife, Evvie, in June 1948 and they had four sons. Mr. and Mrs. Chaffee eventually settled in the Seattle, Washington, area. They were both baptized into God's Church in the mid-1970s and attended the Seattle/Tacoma congregation. Mr. Chaffee had a quiet sense of humor that sometimes caught his listeners off-guard. He enjoyed telling stories about the days before paved roads and trucks, when Clydesdale horses hauled the logs his family used in their box-building business. Mr. Chaffee was preceded in death by his wife of 66 years and two older brothers. He is

survived by four sons and their wives, 17 grandchildren, 25 great-grandchildren, and 3 great-great-grandchildren, as well as many nieces and nephews.

Mr. Henry Cooper, 79, died on July 8. A longtime minister, he served his Church family across Ireland and the UK, as well as at Feast of Tabernacles sites in Kenya and Tanzania. He and his wife, Rosemary, started attending God's Church in the 1960s. He was ordained an elder in 1982, by which time they had five children to look after while they travelled the length and breadth of Ireland to serve God's people. In 2005–2006, Mr. Cooper shouldered responsibility for the LCG congregations in the UK and made regular trips to London during the interval between two regional directors. His home congregation was in Dublin, Ireland. He once described his work as "challenging but extremely rewarding." Mr. Cooper also held a senior position in a bank, and after his retirement he became involved in the caring community, assisting young adults with special needs. Mr. Cooper was very much a family man, as well as an encouraging example of servant leadership in action. He was well loved and respected by all who knew him.

Mrs. Edith Culbert, 90, of the Dublin congregation died on September 18. A longtime member of God's Church, she was baptized in 1966. Her husband, Jim, was also a member and predeceased her in 2013 after 59 years of marriage.

Mr. Eldon Davis, 90, died on November 16 after struggling with several physical ailments for a number of years. Baptized in 1961, he was a longtime member of God's Church. Mr. Davis served as a faithful elder for many decades, tirelessly traveling up and down the Okanagan Valley, both in British Columbia and in Washington state, serving the brethren. He will also be remembered for never wavering when the changes came in the mid-1990s, offering solid advice to many who were seeking the truth. He took great joy in his collection of Church material, including his first correspondence with the Church and the letter from Mr. Carl McNair in 1960, inviting him to attend services. He was a dedicated servant and will be missed by everyone. His wife, Mary-Lou, also of the Tonasket, Washington, congregation, appreciates your prayers.

Mr. Raymond "Ray" Drewes, 78, died on July 3, surrounded by his family and friends. Mr. Drewes was baptized into the Church of God in 2013 and attended the Seattle/Ta-

coma, Washington, congregation. Mr. Drewes had such a giving spirit. He was always busy helping with whatever needed to be done, whether setting up for services, hauling sound equipment to Holy Days, or serving widows. He is survived by his wife, Margie, as well as four daughters and a sister.

Mrs. Helen Foster, 91, of the Taunton congregation in the UK, died peacefully on the evening of June 26 with her daughter holding her hand. Mrs Foster was a faithful and dedicated member of God's Church since the early 1980s. She suffered several serious health problems for many years but maintained a positive approach throughout. The focus of her life was the return of Jesus Christ and God's coming kingdom. Mrs. Foster is survived by her daughter, her son, and their families. She will be fondly missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing her.

Mr. Clayton Gall, 90, died Sunday, August 26. He was baptized in 1968 and attended the Regina, Saskatchewan, congregation in Canada. He loved to dance. During the last years of his life he lived in a care home, where he was well taken care of by his daughter. One highlight in the last year of his life was a visit from dozens of brethren during the Feast of Tabernacles in 2022. Mr. Gall was deeply moved and said with tears, "It was such a blessing to see so many people."

Mr. Glen Hart, 85, died on September 23. Baptized on January 25, 1976, with his wife, Lucille, Mr. Hart was a tremendous example in his community and dearly loved by family and friends. Besides his wife, he is survived by daughters Krysta and Jacklyn, who also attend the Ft. Francis congregation in Ontario.

Mrs. Jessie Jeffrey, 83, of the London congregation in the UK, died peacefully on September 7 after being admitted to hospital a few days earlier. Mrs. Jeffrey was baptized in 1963. She was always positive, happy, and helpful, and she had a good sense of humor. Hers was a race well run. Mrs. Jeffrey is survived by three of five children, in addition to grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Linza MacDonald, 97, of the Victoria, British Columbia, congregation, died on September 26 while enjoying her breakfast. Even though Mrs. McDonald lived the last number of years in a nursing home because of failing eyesight and hearing, she remained dedicated to God and His Church until she finished her race, and she always encouraged others to do the same. Baptized in 1960, she was one of the longest-time members of God's Church in Canada.

Mr. John Meakin, 75, died peacefully at home, surrounded by family, on November 16. He had suffered from a lung disease for a decade, dealing with it positively. Mr. Meakin was an elder and pastor in the UK for nearly 50 years, as well as a writer

for Church publications. He was predeceased by his beloved wife, Lynn, in 2020, after a 45-year partnership of service to God, each other, God's people, and the Work. Mr. Meakin is survived by three children and their spouses, as well as five grandchildren. He will be greatly missed by countless people and remembered as a true shepherd to God's flock, a guide and encourager of others in their trials, and a peaceable man of conviction, wisdom, dedication, and diligence—as well as for his great sense of humor. Regional director Peter Nathan officiated at the memorial service, and Dr. Scott Winnail officiated at the graveside service.

Mr. Shawn Nowlan, 75, died on November 16. He attended the Fredericton, New Brunswick, congregation. Mr. Nowlan is survived by his wife, Pearl, as well as his two children and five grandchildren who reside in Australia. He was a hard worker who could never sit still. He was very generous and served the brethren and his friends in any way he could. He will be sadly missed by all who came to know him. The burial was conducted by pastor Shane Kruse.

Mr. Bobby Patterson, 78, of the Lurgan congregation in Northern Ireland, died suddenly in hospital on May 21. His family deeply appreciated the prayers and cards from Church members.

Mrs. Mary Covington Peters, 85, died May 14. Mrs. Peters was baptized in 1999 and, along with family members, attended the Louisville, Kentucky, congregation. Though retired from working at the local hospital, she continued to work well into her 80s as a caregiver who was highly sought after. She loved serving the brethren by providing luncheons and hosting widows during the Holy Days. She was a very hard worker with a wide range of talents. She enjoyed giving generously from her garden, baked goods, and crochet. She leaves behind an example of hard work and service to others. Mrs. Peters is survived by four children, five grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. She will be dearly missed. As she wished, Mr. Lambert Greer conducted her funeral service.

Mr. Robert Rice, 84, died on July 1. Mr. Rice was a longtime member of God's Church and attended the Wisconsin Dells congregation. Born in Kenosha, Wisconsin, he also lived in Australia and Arizona and completed two world tours while serving in the U.S. navy. He earned a pilot's license from the Kenosha Regional Airport and held a degree in Aviation Management. He built a log home and had a successful tree service business. Mr. Rice loved hunting and trapping, and especially had a passion for fishing, going to Canada every summer for more than 30 years to fish with a true "band of brothers." Mr. Rice also had a passion for doing God's work and keeping the vision of the Kingdom in sight. He is survived by his wife,

Lynn, as well as six children and twenty grandchildren. Mr. Rice will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Mrs. Sylvia (Gay) Symonds, 89, of the Birmingham congregation in the UK, died peacefully on July 12—almost exactly two years after the similar death of her twin, Joy Jones. Baptized in 1961, she was a longtime member of God’s Church. Mrs Symonds will be remembered for her faithfulness, good humor, and great desire to serve others. She was strong in the faith and in anticipation of the resurrection to come. She came from a large family and is survived by five siblings between the ages of 76 and 94.

Mr. Burl “Smokey” Tolman, 84, died peacefully on October 21, soon after being able to attend his final Sabbath service, and with his “boots on.” He and his wife, Lola, began attending God’s Church in the 1960s and celebrated their 60th anniversary on October 9, just days before his death. Mr. Tolman spent five years in the early 1970s driving a truck for Ambassador College, moving ministers and Church supplies around the United States. He worked for Cummins Intermountain for 27 years and loved talking about engines. He loved old-time things and ways of life, including the idea of the cattle drives and cowboys of the Wild West, and liked to say that he was born 100 years too late. His wife’s reply was always, “You probably would have got shot.” God and His Church were by far the most important things in his life. He loved the brethren and loved serving, right up to the very end. Besides his wife, he is survived by three children, 13 grandchildren, and 17 great-grandchildren. He will be missed by many in the Pacific Northwest and beyond, including the Boise congregation.

Mrs. Gale Ullerick, 83, died at her home on August 23. During her childhood, her family moved many times, and she learned to be adaptable and make friends easily. Mrs. Uller-

ick married her husband, Gary, in February 1958. They had a daughter and a son. They were baptized in 1962 and attended the Seattle/Tacoma, Washington, congregation. Mr. Ullerick was ordained an elder in 1997, and she accompanied him on many of his visits to Alaska and around the Pacific-Northwest region. She loved to learn new things. In order to share her favorite flowers, dahlias, she learned to arrange flowers, and for years brought arrangements for church services, Holy Days, and special occasions. Some of her dahlias won first prize at the state fair. She learned to sing and enjoyed singing in choirs and for special music. Mrs. Ullerick learned the Bible very well over her 61 years in God’s Church, and many of those who knew her appreciated her ability to connect scriptures to specific situations. Mrs. Ullerick was preceded in death by her husband, her parents, and a brother, and is survived by both of her children, two brothers, three grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

Mr. Rick Watts, 57, of the Auburn, Massachusetts, congregation, died on August 28. Mr. Watts lived most of his life in Kansas and attended the Kansas City, Missouri, congregation. He was a truck driver and enjoyed driving in the surrounding states and meeting a wide variety of people. For him and his wife, Robin, one of the greatest joys was spending time with brethren after services at members’ homes or in a restaurant. When not working, he loved being with his grandchildren. He was also an avid lover of pets. After he was diagnosed with cancer about two years ago, Mr. and Mrs. Watts moved to the Northeast where they attended the Albany, New York, congregation, and then to central Massachusetts so that she would be close to her family. Mr. Watts was a dedicated husband, looking out for his wife even in the midst of his trial. He is survived by his wife, two brothers, and his mother, and will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin (Kalie) Detwiler, of the Albany, New York, congregation, are excited to announce the birth of their second child and first daughter, **Bennett Elaine Detwiler**. She was born on October 29 weighing seven pounds, six ounces, and measuring 20.5 inches long. Big brother Archer is already very protective of her and loves to give her kisses. The whole family is completely in love and soaking in every sweet newborn moment.

Mr. and Mrs. Bruno (Jessica) Duval are delighted to announce the birth of their third child, **Élora Salomé Duval**. She was born on August 17 weighing six pounds, six ounces. Her older brother and sister are excited about the arrival of the family’s newest treasure. The Bruno Duval family attend the Montreal congregation in Quebec, Canada.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert (Michelle) Matney are happy to announce the birth of their first child, **Theodore Milo Matney**. He was born on September 14, weighing six pounds, fifteen ounces, and measuring 21 inches long. The Matney family attends the Ottawa, Ontario, congregation.

Ordinations

Mr. Andre Cutrara was ordained an elder on November 11 by pastor Winston Gosse and elder Charles Sutton. Mr. Cutrara serves in the Barrie, Ontario, congregation in Canada.

Mr. Douglas Furgason was ordained a deacon on October 1 by pastors Michael Brown and Winston Gosse. Mr. Furgason serves in the Bonnyville, Alberta, congregation in Canada.

Mr. Daniel Osillos was ordained an elder on the Last Great Day by regional director Rob Tyler and pastors Franklin

Joseph Gonzales and Felipe Casing. Mr. Osillos serves in the Manila congregation in the Philippines.

Mr. Jose Ramos and **Mr. Humberto Semidei** were ordained deacons on October 4, during the Feast of Tabernacles, by pastor Raul Colon and elders Brent Mitchell and Felipe Torres Valentin. Mr. Ramos and Mr. Semidei serve in the San Juan, Puerto Rico, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. John (Margaret) Schapansky were ordained deacon and deaconess on September 23 by evangelist Stuart Wachowicz and pastor Michael Brown. Mr. and Mrs. Schapansky serve

in the Winnipeg, Manitoba, congregation in Canada.

Mrs. Rose Searcy was ordained a deaconess on September 16 by pastor Rick Stafford and elder Phillip Johnson. Mrs. Searcy serves in the Baytown, Texas, congregation.

Mr. Garrett Steagall was ordained an elder on the Feast of Trumpets by pastor Mark Sandor and elder Errol Wade. Mr. Steagall serves in the Minneapolis, Minnesota, congregation.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. Conal (Brigid) McGarvey from the London congregation in the UK celebrated their **60th wedding anniversary** on June 29. Mr. McGarvey has been a baptized member of God's Church since 1976. Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. McGarvey!

Mr. and Mrs. Peter (Karen) Nathan celebrated their **50th wedding anniversary** on April 24. They were married in 1973 in the International Lounge at Ambassador College, Bricket Wood, with Dr. Roderick Meredith giving the bride away. Mr. and Mrs. Nathan were transferred to southern Africa shortly thereafter, where their two children were born. They are currently living in the UK and serving in the UK, Europe, and Africa, where Mr. Nathan is Regional Director. Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Stewart, on behalf of the London congregations, presented them with a bouquet of flowers after services on the Sabbath of April 22.

On July 30, **Mr. Peter Oldrieve** and **Ms. Gemma Monaghan**, of the Hook congregation in the UK, were united in marriage at a small ceremony at Mr. Oldrieve's home, with family and a few friends present. Coincidentally, in April 2021, they were baptized at the same time and location, just minutes apart. Congratulations to the happy couple!

Mr. Geoffrey Ruddlesden and **Ms. Lauren Mallaun** were married on Sunday, October 22, by evangelist Wallace Smith. The outdoor wedding took place near the beautiful banks of the Catawba River in South Carolina, where family members, friends, and brethren witnessed their union as husband and wife and celebrated together at the reception afterward. Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Ruddlesden attend the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation.

Electronic Service Requested

Billions of Eternities

This past Feast, we were reminded to focus on the “big picture” of Christ’s return and the soon-coming eternal Kingdom of God. But when you’re young, even the “small picture” seems enormous. Learning to drive a car is terrifying when you’ve previously only driven—and crashed—a Mario Kart. Getting married is immense enough to overload your brain when the whole of your existence has been *not* married. Realistically, young adults doing their best to meaningfully visualize eternity will probably be about as successful as preschoolers trying to ponder the theory of relativity, and I write that *as* a young adult.

God reminds us to “seek first” His kingdom (Matthew 6:33), and He does so because, let’s face it, we all forget to do that. This might apply even more when you’re young, because it’s difficult to focus your life on the Kingdom of God while also managing all the important earthly milestones young people naturally have to deal with. Because you have to finish school. You have to get a job. You’d really like to marry someone and have children, and then you have to make sure you don’t neglect that spouse and those children. And in the midst of all of this, you have to remember how temporary everything is—even though, right now, it’s legitimately important—so you have to keep talking to God. You have to keep pondering His ways and commands. You have to keep fasting, you have to keep spending time with the Bible, you have to keep examining yourself.

That really is a big picture, and it’s genuinely difficult to keep up with everything without becoming “weary while doing good” (Galatians 6:9). But it’s also a tiny picture—because it’s only about you. While you’re trying really hard not to make

a physical mess of your life, and doing your best not to make a spiritual mess of it either, it can be all too easy to miss the fact that you’re just one person. Yes, God cares so very deeply about you, and you should *never* forget that—but even your eternity is just *one* eternity.

It’s hard to know how many human beings have been conceived since God brought our first parents together in Eden, but considering the current population, it’s reasonable to believe that tens of billions of people have lived on Earth up to this point. And you’re one of them! Congratulations—a *tiny* fraction of the Kingdom of God is about you.

As we’re annually reminded on the Last Great Day, the *world* needs God’s kingdom. It’s about so much more than your personal salvation or mine, and about so much more than the collective saints of God being transformed in the first resurrection. It’s about rescuing everyone in the entire history of the world. It’s about redeeming not just our time, but the whole of time itself. It’s about not just our individual infinite existence, but billions of those infinities.

That’s a big picture. And if our first thought of God’s kingdom is usually “I sure hope I make it there,” we’re forgetting more of that picture than we’re remembering.

We should never stop striving to enter God’s family, because that’s literally the entire point of human existence (Ecclesiastes 12:13), but when we’re trying to think of the big picture, let’s at least remind ourselves that the vast majority of that picture isn’t about us—and let’s thank God for the fact that, regardless of any one of us, His kingdom *will* come, revealing the unfathomable joy of billions of eternities.

—Thomas White