

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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How Does God Place His Name?

Dear Brethren,

It was 1964, and I attended my first Sabbath service only days before the Day of Atonement, which fell on a Wednesday that year. Following that day of fasting, I began traveling for the Feast of Tabernacles, where I camped out on the shores of Lake Tahoe with several other single men—all strangers to me. I have fond memories of that first Feast.

The sermon I heard on the Sabbath before the Feast had addressed the question “How does God place His name?” In retrospect, it seems that this had been a topic of discussion among the leadership—probably because the Church expanded that year to a second site. In 1945, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong began meeting with others for the Feast in Belknap Springs, Oregon. As the Church grew, the site was moved to Seigler Springs in California, and eventually to Big Sandy, Texas. There was only one site until 1964, when Squaw Valley was added along with Big Sandy. My guess is that this engendered the question, “How does God place His name?”

God instructs us that “you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide” (Deuteronomy 14:23). Scripture states explicitly that God has chosen to make His name abide in Jerusalem after Christ returns (Zechariah 14:16–19). It is simply not logistically possible for several billion people to come to Jerusalem each year—yet the command is for *everyone* to keep it *every* year. “You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces *year by year*. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide” (Deuteronomy 14:22–23).

When Zechariah speaks of all nations coming up, he must be speaking of representatives from those nations. We know that the tabernacle was first set up in Shiloh, not Jerusalem (Joshua 18:1).

The Corinthians kept Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread locally, and Paul kept Pentecost outside of Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 5:7–8; 11:17–22; 16:8). This tells us that God has had more than one location set apart for His pilgrimage Feasts. He has also shown the Church in this age that there *needs to be* more than one place for His people around the world to observe the Feast.

Setting up more than one Festival location was new in 1964, which was apparently the reason for sermons on the subject. Nevertheless, the question is still legitimate: Where and how does God place His name for us to keep His Feasts?

Who Decides?

Our Church Administration Department takes many factors into account: a suitable hall that is available for the time needed, sufficient housing, affordable restaurants, safety concerns, a strategic location for people to attend, and much more.

However, the proverbial elephant in the room is, “Who decides?” That was the question in 1964, and it is a question still relevant today. I believe most of you understand that we should not take a vote on the subject. Suitable sites are difficult enough to find—never mind taking a democratic approach to sorting through the difficulties in finding locations. Yet we are often asked, “Why can’t we have a site in [fill in the blank]?” The answer is likely that we already looked into it, but an appropriate venue simply wasn’t available—God didn’t open that door.

One factor that may surprise you is that there has been a change in where and when people in society today are getting married. With more and more people in Western countries dropping away from churches, other meeting rooms are being booked more often for wedding venues. And instead of getting married two months from engagement, couples move in to-

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gether first and book weddings two or three years out. All it takes is one weekend wedding to knock out a potential venue where the Church of God could meet.

But the question “Who decides?” applies to more than Festival site selection. There is no need for me to go into a doctrinal dissertation on Church government, but neither can that subject be neglected in answering this question. God’s word gives general instructions for the individual. For example, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). But He gives only a few instructions on how to do so (vv. 9–11; Isaiah 58:13–14). The ministry should give guidance (1 Corinthians 11:1), but Jesus showed how the Jews of His day took the Sabbath command to ridiculous extremes. We must avoid that.

However, when it comes to community decisions about Sabbath observances, this is not—and from a practical sense, *cannot be*—left up to individuals. Decisions have to be made as to where and when services are held. Everyone cannot decide for themselves, and the Bible nowhere indicates that this subject should be up to the congregation for debating and voting.

God gives us instructions on how to solve controversial decisions (Deuteronomy 17:8–13). This does not imply that Festival site locations or the times to hold services are generally points of contention in the Church, though some few do decide for themselves. The rest of us are reasonable and rational, understanding the big picture.

Decided in an Orderly Fashion

Colossians 2 has been greatly misused by the world of false Christianity. We often spend more time explaining what it does *not* mean than what it *does*, but it has everything to do with the subject at hand. We know that whatever the controversy was in Colossae, it involved “philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles [influential powers] of the world, and not according to Christ” (2:8). The Sabbath and Festivals of God are *of God* and not traditions of men, but how they are kept is another matter.

The *New King James Version* translates verses 16 and 17: “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” The original, inspired

text is “missing” the verb *is* at the end of verse 17, as shown by the *King James Version*, which places the word in italics. The word *substance* is the same word translated elsewhere in Colossians as *body* (1:24; 2:19; 3:15) but translators here changed it to *substance* according to their bias against the Sabbath and God’s Festivals. Properly translated, Colossians 2:16–17 should read, “So let no one [no human being] judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of [foreshadow] things to come, *but the body of Christ.*” Yes, the Sabbath and Festivals foreshadow future events—when people neglect them, they miss the lessons of the Holy Days. We are not to let someone come along with human traditions and philosophies to tell the body of Christ *how* to observe these days.

Those destabilizing the early Church in Colossae were ascetics with gnostic ideas of intermediary angels between God and man. “Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and *worship of angels*, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head [Christ].... Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles [influential powers] of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to [human] regulations—‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’... *according to the commandments and doctrines of men?*” (vv. 18–22).

Christ is the Head, and He appoints His leaders to ensure that common matters for the Sabbath and Festivals are decided in an orderly fashion for His body. “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers... for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–12). Yes, the organized Church must decide where Christ is placing His name. Oftentimes, by opening or closing doors, God makes it abundantly clear in an orderly manner—not to each individual, but to His ordained leaders—where He has placed His name. So, let us be grateful for those locations to which God has opened doors this year to show us where to keep the Feast of Tabernacles!



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A Storm Is Coming: Are We Ready?

The *Gathering Storm* has been the title of our *Tomorrow's World* Presentations this year. These presentations are intended to reach an outside audience—an audience that is already familiar with *Tomorrow's World* and perhaps the Living Church of God. Some, but certainly not all, have a Church of God background.

Our magazine, our telecast, and most of our other initiatives proclaim the good news of the coming Kingdom of God and give a warning as a witness. We know from Scripture that this is our responsibility—we are commissioned to do so. However, there is another part of this great commission: “Go therefore and *make disciples of all the nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19–20).

Unlike our magazine, telecast, and booklets, *Tomorrow's World* Presentations give much more than a witness. They are meant to nudge along people whom God may be calling, making it clear what they personally should do as a result of hearing the true Gospel and being warned of things to come. We sincerely hope that some of these people will respond to the call, be baptized, and become part of the Body of Christ.

However, we know that these will be few. Thousands are invited to *Tomorrow's World* presentations—people who have received a witness through our magazine and telecast. They have been introduced to the Gospel and given a warning message. But, of those invited, only 1 or 2 percent, on average, even show up, although some presentations reach higher percentages. And, of those who attend, it is evident that most either “don’t get it” or are not courageous enough to step out of their comfort zone. The message that we give them, no matter how clearly and powerfully presented, flies right over their heads. But we know that we are not here to convert the world. We are here to be a witness, and to work with the precious few who do respond to God’s calling.

Beyond Fear Alone

The Gathering Storm is a title meant to capture the attention of those who will attend. We hope to wake them up to the reality of where this world is heading. Last June, at a presentation in Winnipeg, Canada, I made the statement, “I’m not here to scare you”—but, realizing that was not quite

accurate, I immediately corrected myself: “Well, that is not entirely right. I *do* hope to scare you, at least a little bit.” That brought laughter from the audience. Fear can be a motivating factor. As Scripture tells us twice, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10).

I recently reread Mr. Herbert Armstrong’s booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled at Last*. I was about 16 years old the first time I read it. It was a real shocker, and I got sick that night—probably some kind of stomach bug—and by morning I could only crawl to the bathroom. This attention-getter introduced me to the truth. The booklet’s biblical content, along with Basil Wolverton’s artwork, gave me a fright in the midst of my being so sick. Adding to that fear, the thought of a future nuclear war was especially frightening, as I knew only too well where “ground zero” would be—on the Air Force Strategic Air Command base where I lived with my parents. I did not understand exactly what my father did at work, but I knew those Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles were not there to place civilian satellites in orbit.

While fear can be a motivator to bring us to the truth, our journey must go beyond fear alone. Yes, we must fear God, but we must also love God and His ways. Loving God, His way, His truth, and the hope He gives us helps us overcome any irrational fear of the future. We are probably not being honest with ourselves if we say we have no apprehension about what is ahead, but by knowing the truth, our fear is lessened. Our love for God—and understanding His love for us, as outlined in His Festivals and Holy Days—“casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).

We must come to realize, no matter what happens to us, that our loving Father allows or causes any trials for our long-term good. Some trials are severe and can be physically and emotionally painful. But if we serve our Father wholeheartedly, nothing can happen to us that is not for our benefit. As Paul explains,

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without

chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons (Hebrews 12:5–8).

Catching Up to the Storm

When people receive too many false warnings, they will likely fail to heed the real warning when it comes. This is the moral of “The Boy Who Cried Wolf,” and this is what happens to many hurricane victims after so many overwrought forecasts.

We in the Church of God have at times made the mistake of getting ahead of God when it comes to timing Jesus’ return to set up His kingdom. That error is not new—Christ’s followers expected Jesus to set up His kingdom in their time. Paul twice spoke of “we who are alive” in reference to the coming of Christ and the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17).

It is not the Church alone that gets ahead of the curve. Brad Smith and Carol Ann Browne write in *Tools and Weapons* about how accurate we can be in our predictions—and, at the same time, how wrong we can be when it comes to timing them.

Repeatedly in my quarter century at Microsoft, I’ve been impressed by the ability of engineering leaders to anticipate much of where computing is going. But their predictions around time frames are much more checkered.... as Bill Gates has famously remarked, “We always overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next ten” (2019, p. 240).

Of course, we are not futurists in the human sense, with expertise in worldly matters. But, like Christ, we must speak what God reveals in His word. We can know the outline of history in advance from a humble reading of the Bible and as God opens our minds by His Spirit. And our understanding only comes when God unseals His prophecies (Daniel 12:4). However, as with software engineers, we human beings have a poor record when it comes to the timing of future events. That is why I have personally avoided even giving ranges of time, other than picking a time relatively far off by saying, “I doubt that we have 50 years.” Even that could be in error, but I don’t think so; when we look at the dramatic moral decline of the Israelite nations and the sudden acceleration of end-time criteria, time does seem short.

Last year, Mr. Jonathan McNair gave a sermon in which he referenced the story of Chicken Little. The point of this sermon was that, unlike in the children’s story, the impending disaster is real and may be much closer than we imagine—and, when it does arrive, will we be prepared?

One evening, a few years ago, I was returning home from a Bible study in Wichita, Kansas. A massively beautiful thunderstorm—a common occurrence in that part of the country—mesmerized me as I traveled northwest toward my home several hours away. It was a rolling stormfront with continuous

lightning; there was not even a second between flashes along the well-defined front. The weather service over the radio warned of frequent lightning, hail, high winds, and possible tornados.

It was exciting to see, and I wanted to get closer. I followed the front for nearly an hour before finally catching up to it, but I was not quite ready for what would happen. The wind suddenly picked up, with gusts that threatened to toss me off the road. Rain was blowing sideways, and lightning was all around. I was uncertain of what would come next. Would there be large hail, or might a tornado descend from the sky? Seeking a place to hide, I found an underpass crowded with other cars hiding out—which, by the way, I now understand is not a good strategy to use when anticipating a tornado. After some minutes, the storm moved on, and I, along with the others, came out from hiding.

What About Us?

In many ways, this is what happens to us as we look forward to the fulfillment of end-time prophecies and the reality of the annual seventh-month Festivals. We will hear sermons explaining the exciting meaning of these special occasions. They are so familiar that you can probably give one-sentence descriptions for each of them: the Feast of Trumpets—the Day of the Lord culminating in Christ’s return; Day of Atonement—Satan being removed; Feast of Tabernacles—Christ’s Millennial reign; and Last Great Day—the Great White Throne Judgment and all it means.

We pray for the fulfillment of these days. We look forward to the sounding of the seventh trumpet, when our resurrection to eternal life in the Family of God will come. We look forward to the time when we will assist Christ in bringing this troubled, suffering, rebellious, and confused world to a better state. But much must happen between now and then. While we tell our *Tomorrow’s World* subscribers about a gathering storm, are we so mesmerized by the beauty of what will eventually come afterwards that we fail to see the power of that very same storm? What are we doing to prepare for it?

The one-year period of the Day of the Lord is the time of God’s wrath (Isaiah 34:8; 63:4; Revelation 6:17). Prior to that will be the ride of the four horsemen, the martyrdom of saints, and the heavenly signs. However, we must not assume that all will be well before the white horse of Revelation 6 begins its ride. Turbulent times are ahead. A whole geopolitical transformation is in the making—and has, indeed, already begun. The U.S. dollar, the global reserve currency since shortly after World War II, could suddenly collapse. Whatever that means, it is not good. We cannot rule out another pandemic. And those who refuse to go along with the perverse LGBTQIA+ movement may find themselves without jobs.

We can turn to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 for descriptions of what is ahead as God ratchets up the punishment to grab the attention of an unrepentant people. What is clear in those pivotal chapters is that trouble is ahead. A

storm *is* coming. Will we be ready when it hits? Or do we dismiss this as merely another warning from Chicken Little?

We all recognize that there are some events for which we will never be fully prepared—and this certainly applies to the storm ahead. There is no humanly created safe haven, such as a highway underpass or missile bunker, to offer escape. Neither gold nor guns will save us. Only a close relationship with our Creator will do that.

In the next few weeks, we will once again have the opportunity to come together before God during His ordained Feasts. We will hear sermons, have fellowship with one another, and enjoy fine food and drink. But I hope we all—and I include myself—recognize the need to use this precious time to fellowship with our Creator. As John wrote, “truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). Let us not become so busy that we fail that most important fellowship!

The reality pictured by the last four Feast days is soon to dawn. We cannot know exactly how much time will pass before that day comes, but we can know that *it is* coming as surely as the sun rises each day. But, again, a lot more must happen between now and then—and as much as we try to mentally rehearse what is ahead, the reality will no doubt be very different.

Many of us have the feeling that big surprises are on the way. Economic, political, social, and monetary tsunamis are in our near future. Merely having a feeling about the future does not mean that we are correct; however, since the COVID-19 lockdowns, we see that world events have sped up dramatically. Who would have guessed the Russian invasion of Ukraine? Who knew that a sudden push to rearm Germany would occur as a result? Which one of us foresaw the sudden onset of worldwide inflation?

Bad things must occur to set the stage for the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord. There is good news, however. Our elder Brother tells us, “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:28). Truly, as Paul admonished the church in Rome, “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11).

There is also One who will guide us through difficult times. He has always done so for His people as they experience sickness, war, and other traumas. He has been there for us when we lost a job, a spouse, or a child. And He will be there for us as we move into the uncertain times that must precede Christ’s return, Satan’s banishment, a glorious Millennium, and the Second Resurrection. We know this. However, God also gave us the warning not to be caught off guard.

What God Expects

The first portion of the Olivet Prophecy describes times leading up to the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord,

and then we receive valuable insight as to what God expects of us at this time. Jesus Christ instructs us, “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matthew 24:42–44).

Christ then asks a question vital for this crucial time in mankind’s history: “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing” (vv. 45–46). Yes, the wise servant is not serving himself, but is serving God—doing the Work of God by preaching the Gospel to all nations and warning them of what is to come. Tragically, some who fail to see this big picture are satisfied with sitting at home or in small groups, thinking they are “preparing the Bride”—as if the Bride can even *be* prepared without doing the Work that her future Husband has assigned to her.

Proverbs 24:11–12 admonishes us, “Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, ‘Surely we did not know this,’ does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?”

Jesus promises a reward for those who do His Work. “Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods” (Matthew 24:47; cf. John 4:36). Next comes a warning for those who try to time Christ’s coming and get caught up in this world’s ways. “But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:48–51).

Regrettably, a few come to the Feast to party, focusing only on having a good time. Yes, God tells us that we are to enjoy the fruits of our labor, to spend our “money for whatever your heart desires” (Deuteronomy 14:26), but that does not mean taking a worldly approach. The overriding principle is “that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always” (v. 23).

Let us rejoice. Let us revel in the good things to come. But let us not forget that the storm that precedes those good things is also coming. “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:6–8). ^{LN}



Develop Godly Relationships

By **Richard F. Ames**

As we prepare for the upcoming Feast of Tabernacles, we may think of the enjoyable activities at our site, the inspiring messages from ministers who have prepared “meat in due season” for us, and the opportunity to enjoy delicious meals in a millennial setting.

And we may think of the people we’ll meet—old friends and new. One of the great blessings of the Feast of Tabernacles is the opportunity it gives us to nurture and develop godly relationships with the people around us. That opportunity isn’t just for eight days of enjoyment—we can think of it as practice for eternity. God has created us as potential members of His family, and when we are born into that family we will experience godly relationships forever.

Love God, Love One Another

God desires to dwell with us as His family. The Apostle John emphasized our need to develop nurturing and loving relationships. We will enjoy those godly relationships for all eternity, and we are learning now how to love one another.

Our obedience to God is directly related to our love for the people around us. We read, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (1 John 4:20–21).

So, when we love God, we naturally demonstrate that love by loving one another. Loving relationships are interconnected, and our love must radiate in all directions. The way we demonstrate that love toward God is by loving our neighbors—and even loving our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

Jesus Christ came that we might have life and “have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). But how do we experience and practice that abundant life? Life is based upon relationships, and eternal life is based on the relationships between God and His family, between Jesus Christ and His spiritual brothers and sisters.

What is your purpose for being? When a Pharisee asked Jesus to identify the greatest of God’s commandments, our Savior replied with His own words from Deuteronomy 6:5

and Leviticus 19:18: “Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37–40).

Are you fulfilling those commandments? Dear readers, loving relationships are God’s very purpose for our lives! When we are selfish, we are putting ourselves ahead of God and failing to carry out His desire for us. So, let us briefly consider seven keys for developing the godly, loving relationships He wants us to have.

Share Your Life

Paul exhorted the Christians in Rome, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1–2). How do we do this? We sacrifice our selfish desires in order to serve those around us.

That may mean sacrificing some of your time. Maybe you’ll provide physical service like taking a widow shopping, or giving brethren rides to Sabbath services and other Church activities. It may mean helping a disabled person with housework or yardwork.

Or it may mean simply showing outflowing concern by having a conversation with someone. Face-to-face conversations can be not just a great joy, but a source of encouragement for ourselves and others. And there is of course the Internet, though we need to be careful of the many dangers of social media.

Another way to improve interpersonal communication is by sharing personal information. One of my textbooks makes an important point about self-disclosure: “For someone to be important to you, you must know something about him/her that matters to you and that makes a great difference to you. If you don’t know much about the person, it’s not likely that your acquaintance will amount to much of a relationship” (Bobby Patton and Kim Griffin, *Interpersonal Communication*

in Action, 1981, p. 345). Now, we must use caution, and we shouldn't think that we are so important that others need to know about everything we think and do. But if you care about someone, you will naturally want to learn about his or her life experiences, hopes, dreams, and plans for the future.

During the Feast of Tabernacles, more than at some other times of the year, we may have discretionary time to converse with one another and to get to know one another better. Our speech matters to God. We read:

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him. Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him" (Malachi 3:16–18).

Do you fear God and meditate on His name? God is writing a book of remembrance—and some of the conversations that you've had will be in it! And we know that personal sharing is an important part of our relationship with God the Father. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Remember David's heartfelt prayer when he was sharing his life with God. He said, "How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1). David was saying, *You're taking too long to answer my prayer!* He was open and heartfelt when he communicated with God in prayer.

Of course, we must make sure what we are sharing is the truth. David prayed, "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3). He also prayed, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). Honest communication is vital.

Get to Know Others

How can you be sure that you really know your Savior? Scripture gives us this vital sign: "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3). When you obey God, you are developing your relationship with Him, knowing Him better by knowing and practicing His ways.

We know that most of the world around us knows little or nothing about the real God the Father or the real Jesus Christ. But we should be honest with ourselves: How much do *you* know about God the Father? How much do you know about your Savior Jesus Christ and His life?

Advertising executive Bruce Barton wrote a book entitled *The Man Nobody Knows*. He was a co-founder of what became the major advertising agency BBDO. I visited his office in Atlanta when we were doing a broadcast for *The World Tomorrow*. For many years, he had a false concept of Jesus of Nazareth. But then he resolved to set aside the many sermons he'd heard about the stereotypical Jesus portrayed by mainstream Christianity. He said to himself, "A physical weakling[?] Where did they get that idea? Jesus pushed a plane and swung an adze; he was a successful carpenter. He slept outdoors and spent his days walking around his favorite lake. His muscles were so strong that when he drove the money-changers out, nobody dared to oppose him! A kill-joy[?] He was the most popular dinner guest in Jerusalem!" Barton came to the conclusion that Jesus "is a man nobody knows" (1925, p. iv).

Like Barton, we in God's Church should strive to know the real Jesus as intimately as we can. So, how much do you know about His life? Do you know His many titles? He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He is "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father," and "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). He is the "Savior of the world" (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14). He is King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16; 17:14). He is our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:15). He is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 36). He is "the bread of life" (John 6:35, 48). And that's just a few of so many you can find in your Bible.

And just as you will get to know God better when you know His many names and titles, that principle applies in our day-to-day interactions with other people. You probably interact from time to time with service workers wearing nametags. Interactions can be much more pleasant and personal when you address the other person by name. Dale Carnegie brought out that principle in his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. He wrote that "a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language" (1981, p. 79).

As we age, it can be harder to remember people's names, but we should try as much as we can. The personal touch in communication can make a world of difference. Your prayer list can help with this, as well.

Submit to One Another in Service

We all know Christ's admonition about servant leadership: "Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant'" (Matthew 20:25–26).

The Apostle Peter also wrote about godly submission: "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be

clothed with humility, for ‘*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*’” (1 Peter 5:5).

However, it may be more difficult for some of us to follow another of Peter’s admonitions:

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

Peter wasn’t saying that we should endure or tolerate child abuse or spousal abuse. But we should look to our Savior’s example when we are treated unjustly, and endure that treatment with humility and patience. As we do so, God is pleased with us, and we are developing His character in our own lives. If a loved one or a supervisor at work mistakenly accuses you of some fault, you may want to think twice be-

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fore lashing out and claiming you’ve been wronged. Examine yourself and consider whether the other person might have been right after all—and if not, proceed with humility rather than anger. Remember: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

And we have a special responsibility to serve our brethren. Paul admonishes us, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). At the Feast, we have so many opportunities to shine our light to carnal people we meet, whose only exposure to God’s Church may be through their experience with us. And even more so, we have opportunities to submit to and serve our Church brethren.

Develop Communication Skills

Sometimes we may think of “communication skills” as the ability to speak meaningfully and persuasively. But listening is also a vital communication skill. God tells us, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27). And the Apostle John seven times heard in vision, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

How well we hear God will even affect our eternal reward. In one of His parables, Christ explained, “For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light. Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him” (Luke 8:17–18).

I grew up in a family where I didn’t get to converse very much, and I had to learn how to speak to others. When I went to Ambassador College, I learned how to introduce conversation. Young people at our LYP Teen Camp have learned conversational skills; Mr. Wallace Smith has taught classes from a book titled *How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends*. So, if you feel you are too shy, you might want to look at that book. Or, if you are a teen reading this, that’s one more reason to plan to attend Teen Camp, if you can. Conversation can be a wonderful part of your Feast of Tabernacles experience.

And it is never too late to learn. I had been married for 14 years when I started my master’s degree program at Stephen F. Austin University, and I had to take a class titled “Interpersonal Communication.” Students were given an

assignment to improve one of their personal relationships, and of course I chose my relationship with my wife. I realized I was spending so much time playing basketball and golf at Ambassador College in Big Sandy that I was not giving as much time to my wife as I should have been.

So, I made the living sacrifice of doing something she wanted to do. She wanted to go canoeing on Lake Loma. I didn’t really want to do that, but one Sunday I got the canoe and took her out canoeing on the lake—and it improved my relationship with her. Sometimes we must sacrifice our personal preferences—and we will find that we are glad we did.

It can be easy to take offense at someone else’s communication. Sometimes it comes in the form of a question, not a statement. We may be tempted to answer a factual question with an emotional response. Of course, sometimes someone comes to us with what seems like a question, but is really a request to be helped or simply to have a problem acknowledged. But we should resist the temptation to respond emotionally to another person who just wants the facts from us. When someone wants emotional support, give that support. But when someone wants information, give information if appropriate, not your emotional response to their request. We know that there *are* times for emotion; Ecclesiastes 3:4 tells us there is a time to laugh and a time to cry. But always we are to be “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). We must learn to listen accurately and generously, and we must learn to respond with patience, humility, and love.

Pray for One Another

One way we respond to each other and help one another is through our fervent prayers. We have published so much about this and had many fine sermons on the subject, so I won't spend too much time here trying to write something new. Instead, I'll point to some excellent resources that other ministers have shared, which you can find at *LCC.org*. There's "Pray for One Another Always" (DVE 1248) by Mr. Rod McNair. He added "Always" to his original sermon title because I had ten years earlier given a sermon titled "Pray for One Another" (DVE 654). And for our July–August 2023 *Living Church News*, Mr. Jonathan McNair wrote a fine article, "How to Pray." And, of course, there's our foundational booklet by Dr. Meredith, *Twelve Keys to Answered Prayer*.

Are you continuous in prayer, as the brethren were when Peter was delivered from his ordeal in prison (Acts 12:5)? So many of our brethren have needs and trials to overcome, and one way to develop a relationship with them—and also with God, who wants to hear our supplications—is to pray fervently. Do you have a prayer list that keeps you in touch with the needs of your brethren? Do not neglect prayer as a vital way to develop loving relationships with your brethren.

Choose Your Relationships Carefully

I'm sure you have read the proverb that goes, "The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray" (Proverbs 12:26). It is never a good idea to develop relationships with people who will try to turn you away from practicing God's way of life. Young people are especially vulnerable to peer pressure—however, over the years I have seen some among our Church youth standing up for truth against the crowd. And adults are not immune to peer pressure, either, and may face the temptation of trying to fit in at work or in social situations instead of practicing righteousness.

Some of you may be aware that the *KJV* and *NKJV* translations of Proverbs 18:24 aren't quite accurate. But it is an important verse that teaches a vital principle. The *New International Version* translation tells us, "One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Do you have unreliable friends? Are you an unreliable friend?

The *NKJV* translates the first part of the verse as, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly." That's not actually what the verse says in Hebrew, but it, too, is a valuable principle. Yet we should not extend our friendship to those who would corrupt us. "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when you do not perceive in him the lips of knowledge" (Proverbs 14:7). And "if sinners entice you, do not consent" (Proverbs 1:10). No carnal friendship is worth the loss of eternal friendship with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and our brothers and sisters in the Family of God.

Do you realize that God has chosen you as His friend? Abraham "was called the friend of God" (James 2:23). And Jesus Christ made this amazing statement about faithful Christians: "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

To be a friend of God, we must not let ourselves be drawn into sinful friendships with the world. And we must not be prideful; we should remember the admonition to "let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:3). That doesn't mean that the ungodly are better than we are; it means that if we can help a sinner come to righteousness, it is worth doing so. That sinner is a potential friend of God and eternal member of His family. This leads us to our final point for developing godly relationships.

Fulfill Your Mission

God's Church has a mission, and each of us in His Church has a part in that. Christ told us, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). We work together as God's people to complete the Work that He has given us to accomplish.

Are you developing a relationship with that Work? By reading the *Living Church News* you are doing that, taking advantage of godly exhortation and teaching to help you grow closer to God and His Church. And even though the *Tomorrow's World* magazine is meant primarily for those who do not yet participate in the Work of the Church, by reading it we gain insight into the Church's mission to preach the true Gospel and proclaim a warning.

Though there isn't space in this article to recapitulate it in full, I also urge you to review and meditate on the "Seven-fold Commission" of God's Church, as Dr. Meredith described it some years ago. You can read about this in more depth in his May-June 2009 *Living Church News* article "The Purpose for God's Church," which is available online at *LCC.org*.

We have a mission as a Church, and each of us individually can advance that mission by our godly conduct and relationships. As we prepare to share our lives with our brethren at the Feast of Tabernacles, let us pay particular attention to the quality of our relationships—both with God and with one another. God promises to draw near to us as we draw near to Him.

So, let us strive to develop and enhance godly relationships in all areas of our lives. Let us "love one another fervently with a pure heart" (1 Peter 1:22). And let's rejoice in the promise of God's soon-coming Kingdom, where His eternal love will foster godly relationships that will last for all eternity. God has called us to be a part of His loving family—our very purpose in life! Let's rejoice in the development of our godly relationships, now and forever. (L)



Beauty for Ashes

By **Wallace G. Smith**

The Fall Festival season reminds us that our present world is mercifully destined for the ash heap of history, and that God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ will do all They must to replace it with a far better world—and to complete Their plan of salvation for humanity, inaugurating the expanded Family of God.

The prophet Isaiah describes this change from one world to another, using words Jesus Christ partially quoted during His ministry:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them *beauty for ashes*, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified (Isaiah 61:1–3).

That turn of phrase—that the Eternal will give suffering mankind “beauty for ashes”—is a succinct yet moving summary of exactly what the Fall Festivals are about. Reviewing how this world went from a place of beauty to a place of ashes, yet will once again become a place of beauty, is a worthwhile exercise for this time of year.

A World of Beauty

Before we consider what God will do once carnal humanity ceases to devastate the current world, it is worth considering what He did when His original creation had become corrupted, requiring a “reboot.”

The world before the re-creation week detailed in Genesis 1–2 was ravaged by “chaos and ruin”—another translation of the Hebrew wording that the *New King James Version* renders as “without form, and void” in Genesis 1:2. Satan’s

rebellion had left behind a devastated world. But, over the course of six days leading up to His seventh-day Sabbath, God remade that ruined world into something *beautiful*. Scripture records that He paused at the end of each day to note that “it was good.” From the destruction of the past, God was creating something truly good and beautiful.

Yes, God cares greatly about beauty. For instance, He didn’t need to make the rising and setting of the sun such beautiful events. The sun could have just sunk down and disappeared over the horizon in a utilitarian sort of way. But instead, He arranged the sun, the composition of our atmosphere, and other factors so that a beautiful sunset will be full of glorious reds and oranges filling the horizon, lighting the surroundings in a special manner, reflecting off the clouds in ways that highlight their altitude, composition, and configuration. Something in us seems designed to resonate with those moments.

Indeed, God *filled* His creation with beautiful sights for the eyes. Consider the vistas available in places like Hawaii, with its cliffs and views of the vast ocean, amidst a treasure trove of tropical plants and trees. Even the volcanoes, as terrifying as some can be, thrill us with their awe-inspiring power and their particular majesty.

Mountain ranges did not have to inspire us or stir our souls. No “laws of geography” would be violated if the vast Grand Canyon did not move us to awe. Life could still function if the world below the ocean waves, with its coral reefs and colorful, exotic creatures, were not so stunning. The sounds of the birds and the rustle of leaves as the wind makes its way through a forest canopy need not draw our minds upward and fill us with a calming satisfaction. Yet we seem, by design, to react to so many beautiful sights and sounds around us in ways we would not want to be without.

God’s plan required a *functional* world, but He chose of His own volition to create a *beautiful* one. In this way, as in so many others, the created order reflected its Creator, whom Scripture describes in many passages as Himself beautiful (e.g., Psalm 45:2; 27:4; Isaiah 33:17).

So, how beautiful must that first Sabbath have been for Adam and Eve—when God first set down His brush as His canvas was finally complete from edge to edge? What sights would they have seen in the beautiful, living world their

Creator had handcrafted for them? What sounds would have greeted them from moment to moment?

It was surely a beautiful world. And it was a world intended to become only *more* beautiful, as the man and woman living in it increased their family and grew in character to eventually join God's own family—traveling from “glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18). The beauty that began in the garden could have, eventually, grown that much more beautiful and expanded to include the entirety of creation, as the Creator intended.

A World of Ashes

Fast-forward 6,000 years, and we find that the former world of beauty is becoming a world of ashes.

Yes, some of us are blessed to live in places where it is easier to pretend that things are not “all that bad.” Our communities are still relatively safe. We have homes, or at least good shelter. We have sufficient access to goods and services. Sure, they may be more expensive than we would like, but we manage to get by. But that relative comfort is absolutely an illusion—one that billions of our fellow human beings do not share. And even our relative comfort is not guaranteed.

Years ago, when I was helping to answer questions from people writing to us at the *Tomorrow's World* page on Facebook, I was struck by one comment about an article describing Jesus' return. I have long since lost the exact quote, but the sense of it has stuck with me: *Man, I hope Jesus doesn't come back for another 75 years, because life is pretty good.* One can tell that this was someone commenting from a privileged perspective in the Western world, because life for most of humanity today is not “pretty good” at all. Life is full of suffering and difficulty, and if it hadn't yet touched that individual, it would eventually.

Consider that, for all our growing knowledge in the fields of medicine and health, we are ravaged by a growing list of diseases, disorders, and dysfunctions that we cannot heal or even treat competently. For all our advances in science and our profound insights into the workings of the natural world, daily life in modern society is increasingly childish and petty, addicted to the qualities of the surface even as rot grows below. For all of our public professions of care, concern, and compassion for children, young people today suffer more than ever from broken homes, shattered hopes, and a skyrocketing suicide rate. And, for all of our celebrated “tolerance,” the abject hatred between nations and individuals seems as high as it has ever been.

Today's leaders are often despised by the people they govern, and many of those leaders despise the people “beneath” them. Democratic systems are increasingly going “scorched earth” in campaigns where winning is the ultimate goal—no matter how much hatred and invective must be conjured to assure that victory.

Truly, there is no better world available from our leaders, nor from our neighbors, reflecting the words of the psalmist: “Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help” (Psalm 146:3).

The path that mankind has trod for the last six millennia is filled with bloody footprints and the bodies of those left behind while humanity “advances.” It is a picture sketched in the pages of history to match the carcasses of those Israelites who refused God's promised land in favor of their own imaginations (cf. Numbers 14:29).

One area in which mankind truly has made “progress” from generation to generation is in warfare. And with new advances in technology, humanity now has more options than ever before as to how it might choose to destroy itself—nuclear exchange, biological weaponry, A.I.-enhanced warfare, or just mismanagement of our planet's abundant resources.

One conclusion is plain, because Jesus Christ makes it so: Mankind will bring about a crisis so great that, if left to itself, it would utterly wipe the earth clean of all life: “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:21–22).

It should not be hard for us to recognize that this is so. If we could listen with God's ears to the sounds of Earth, those ears would be filled with sad evidence. Yes, we would find laughter, and places of singing and joy. But we would also hear screams of mourners in villages pillaged by raiders, and of children torn from their parents to become soldiers or sex-slaves. We would hear the weeping of those with no other choice than to work long hours at hard labor for poverty wages. We would hear the mutterings of those whose bodies and minds have been addled by drugs that they once chose voluntarily but to which they have become desperately and painfully addicted.

We cannot deny that, without the guidance—or, in large part, even a passing acknowledgment—of our loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful Creator, all we have built will eventually become ashes.

Why is this so? With such beautiful beginnings, how did we come to such a place?

We Chose the Ashes

Thinking again of that beautiful beginning 6,000 years ago, we must recognize that we are surrounded by ashes today because we chose to be so then, refusing to build upon the foundation God laid for the world and instead establishing our own.

God's purpose for us always extended far beyond the limits of the Garden of Eden, and even the limits of this planet. Our divine purpose is to share the very level of existence that the Father and Son now enjoy—in glory, splendor, and eternal

life, as members of the same divine Family. To achieve that, God made us wonderfully like Himself, giving us a shape and body that reflect His own image and a mind that reflects His own capacity for reason and invention. But even God cannot create from nothing what He most wants from us—holy and righteous character that reflects His own, so that we not only reflect Him on the outside but also radiate His character from within. And developing such character requires us to *choose*.

This is why God gave the Garden of Eden *two* special trees—the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—and gave Adam very clear instructions: *Eat what you want from the garden, but do not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If you do, you will die* (Genesis 2:16–17).

Sadly, the first human beings chose to eat of that tree (Genesis 3). The serpent deceived Eve into eating from it, and then Adam—not deceived in any way—chose with clear-minded purpose to eat from it. The world we see around us is the result of that fateful choice.

It is as if God said, “I’ve created all of this for your good, to nourish you in the light of My path. I’m going to feed you and care for you. I love you. I want nothing more than to work with you and fulfill My beautiful purpose for you. This is My will; obey Me,” and Adam responded, “Thanks, but no thanks, God. We don’t need You. Sure, You’ve done a wonderful job here—thank You very much—but we don’t need You. Please feel free to go and do something else in some other corner of the cosmos, because we want to do *our* will.” God made the results of Adam’s choice very clear:

“Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:17–19).

And with every sin of our own, we repeat Adam’s choice of ashes over beauty. We lay again the foundation Adam first laid: *Not Your will, but mine*. Consequently, as Abraham recognized, we are “but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27). And we have all chosen ashes over beauty at various times in our life. If we are growing spiritually, we should be making that choice far less often than we used to, but if we are honest with ourselves, we know that such choices continue (cf. 1 John 1:8). We sin, telling God, whether for the gain of a momentary pleasure or for the sake of leading an entire self-oriented way of life, *Not Your will, God, but mine*. And that choice is the

foundation of the world we now inhabit. In telling God, *Not Your will, but ours*, the path to beauty became the path to ashes. All the suffering of mankind—every war ever fought, every murder committed, every profit gained through exploitation, every disease ever endured, every loud cry wrenched from hearts filled with despair and pain—has its root in this choice.

Mankind as a whole has not yet realized the truth of this. But God mercifully plans to help us do so before we truly do turn the world to ash. And while the dramatic events that unfold at the end of the age—the seven seals, seven trumpet plagues, and seven bowl judgments, described in painful detail in the book of Revelation—may bring chills down our spine, it is important to remember why God will send them. Those elements of God’s awesome intervention in world affairs at the end of this age give us a brief glimpse of what we ourselves would have done with planet Earth and its people in time.

Carnal human beings murder the good, so what does God give them to drink? The blood that they have chosen for themselves. For nearly 6,000 years, mankind has chosen to destroy instead of build, so God will give it destruction. Our failure is so great that Christ gave us a sobering warning of that time soon ahead. Mankind will find itself on the edge of wiping out all life on our planet, leaving it a speck of lifeless ash in a cold, dead universe, and this will only be prevented by divine intervention at Christ’s return (Matthew 24:22).

Beauty Restored

But God does not give up on His plans and purposes. He accomplishes them (Isaiah 46:8–11), and His plan from the beginning was to build a divine family. The process of being born into that family is more painful as a result of sin, a fact poetically reflected in the punishment God pronounced upon Eve (Genesis 3:16). It required the death of the Son of God—the Creator, Himself—for our sins to be forgiven and washed away upon our repentance. And in achieving that, Jesus Christ established a *new* foundation for the world to come, one that would replace that of mankind and restore the beauty that God had always intended.

On the night before His execution, kneeling before His Father and pleading passionately with Him, Jesus spoke the words that represent that new foundation: “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless *not My will, but Yours, be done*” (Luke 22:42).

And the world that will be built on that foundation—*Not My will, God, but Yours*—will be of stunning beauty. Consider only a few elements, a sampling of the scenes of wonder and glory that will take place over a thousand years under the King of kings and His glorified siblings.

While the events of the end-time will see the destruction of the cities of man (Revelation 16:19), they will be built anew (Isa-

iah 61:4). They will not be like the cities we see today, which are already desolations and centers of poverty, homelessness, crime, and addiction. Rather, they will be cities where the old and the young can gather outside, safely, in streets that ring with the sounds of laughter and playing children (Zechariah 8:4–5).

The lands of the world will be healed: “The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the excellency of our God” (Isaiah 35:1–2).

As waters flow in places once starved of them (v. 6) and life explodes into existence where there had been none, it will be as though the very land itself rejoices in the presence of its Creator and His family. Every new bloom and blossom will serve as a hymn to God, who has restored beauty to the land after so long.

But restoration and healing will not just be for the land; it will also renew the people living there. “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (vv. 5–6). Can we imagine a sight more wonderful than seeing the crippled leaping for joy? The blind given sight? The smiles on the face of the formerly deaf as they hear their loved ones? The sound of the formerly mute as they open their mouths in praise to the One who has freed them?

Not only will individuals be healed—healing will take place between entire peoples. Of those future millennial days, God tells us that “ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’” (Zechariah 8:23).

It is wondrous enough to think of people from every nation of the world longing to learn God’s way for themselves, but consider further: In this the current world of ashes, can you imagine people from nations where Israel is hated asking a Jewish man if they might follow him to learn of God? Grasping the sleeve, not the arm, is a sign of humility. What a beautiful shift in the world!

In tomorrow’s world of beauty, the ashes of man’s hate for his fellow man will be swept into the trash. Ancient enemies will see themselves as fellow peoples of God (cf. Isaiah 19:24). Developed and shaped within the righteous boundaries of God’s law, the different cultures of the different families of man will no longer be excuses for butchering each other. Rather, they will be differences to be enjoyed, as people from all lands parade to Jerusalem every year for the Feast to share of the blessings God has granted them and the prayers and music their people have learned to offer Him (Zechariah 14:16).

In the beautiful world Christ will build, all of humanity will blossom as God originally intended, forming a garden of variety and wonder, all under the hand of a loving and divine Gardener.



These and a thousand other beautiful things await us in tomorrow’s world—all because Christ and His saints will build on *Not my will, but Yours*. Truly, Jesus Christ provides the only foundation any good and beautiful world could ever be built upon (1 Corinthians 3:11). All other “foundations” are quicksand disguised as bedrock.

Build on That Foundation Now

The Feast of Tabernacles is a wonderful time for us to talk with one another about the beautiful world we anticipate *helping Christ to create* in the future. God notices how we speak to each other (cf. Malachi 3:16) as those who long for that time and are eager to make it all the more real in their mind’s eye—in which He sees Himself reflected.

So, talk to your brethren about what makes for a beautiful city, town, or village. Talk about the varieties of beauty the created world can offer, and which you long to help restore. And share with one another your hope for the healing of the world—and how you look forward to taking part in that glorious healing.

More than that, take time at the Feast to renew your conviction to begin building *now* on the foundation found only in Jesus Christ. One of the greatest joys we possess as those who have a clear picture of the better, heavenly country to come (Hebrews 11:14), is the knowledge that we do not need to *wait* to build on that good and right foundation. God has not yet given us the reins of the whole world, but we each hold in our hands the reins of our own lives. How we choose to run our own lives tells our Father how we will run the world when He gives it to us.

Until then, we must choose whether to build those lives on *Not Your will, but mine*, or on *Not my will, but Yours*.

If we choose to build on the latter, then God the Father can take what we have to offer from our past and do just as He and Christ will do for the whole world in the days just ahead: Give us beauty for ashes. (LN)

Did Jesus Break the Sabbath?

By **Wayne Tlumak**

Many people today claim that Jesus and His disciples consistently violated the Fourth Commandment, thereby demonstrating that it was no longer in effect. So, did Jesus Christ break the Sabbath? Did He allow His disciples to violate the Sabbath command?

One fact that becomes abundantly clear in reading the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is that the Jewish leaders had incredible animosity toward Jesus and what He did and taught. He received particular criticism for how He and His disciples behaved on the Sabbath day. Jesus was repeatedly “called out” by the Pharisees and others in response to something He or His disciples did on the Sabbath.

One such accusation came when Jesus and His disciples were walking through a field of grain on the Sabbath. “At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!’” (Matthew 12:1–2).

As Christians, we understand that what the disciples were doing in plucking the grain from someone else’s field was permissible, as seen in Deuteronomy 23:24–25. The statutes of God allowed one to eat from a field or vineyard while standing in it. However, this was a Sabbath day, and the Pharisees said the disciples violated the Sabbath command by plucking and eating the grain. So, *did* Jesus’ disciples violate the Sabbath with His approval, as the Pharisees claimed?

No, the disciples did not violate the Sabbath command that God defined in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. They were not guilty of sin—the transgression of God’s law—by plucking and eating the grain. What they were guilty of doing was violating what became known as rabbinical law. But what is rabbinical law?

A History of Interpretations

Rabbinical laws were rabbis’ oral traditions and their interpretations of the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testa-

ment. These oral traditions, often called the “oral law,” are regarded in Judaism as definitive commentary on the Torah, explaining how its commandments are to be carried out in practical situations. These commentaries and regulations were eventually codified in the Talmud, which is the textual record of generations of rabbinic debates about law, biblical interpretations, and additional rules that some believe began to be codified circa 100 BC. The Talmud became the basis for what we know today as Rabbinic Judaism, which had become the predominant form of Judaism by the sixth century AD. However, these oral traditions and laws, as the Talmud indicates, were observed by the Jews long before the first century and recognized as underlying the “Thirteen Principles of Faith” by Maimonides (1138–1204), one of the greatest medieval Jewish scholars.

Within the Talmud are a set of specific laws pertaining to the Sabbath, which are called the 39 *melachot*. Most observant Jews consider the Talmud to be equal in importance to the Torah, and orthodox Jews go to great lengths to meet the technical requirements and prohibitions of the 39 *melachot*. These are extrabiblical laws—not laws found in the Bible regarding the Sabbath. Jewish authorities codified many of these oral laws before Jesus Christ arrived on the earth.

By reviewing some of these prohibitions, we can better understand why the Pharisees said that Jesus broke the Sabbath. According to the 39 *melachot*, actions prohibited on the Sabbath include plowing, planting, harvesting, separating, grinding, and sifting, to name a few. Perhaps it was the action of plucking the grain, seen as harvesting, that incited the Pharisees, or perhaps the disciples’ separating wheat from chaff by rubbing the grain between their hands.

A “Fence” Around the Law

One of the *melachot* prohibits carrying a burden on the Sabbath outside of your home or personal domain; this is *Hotza’ah*, the thirty-ninth prohibition. A burden, according to the rabbinical teaching, can be house keys, food, or even pushing a baby carriage. This prohibition means, for example, that Jewish women with small children could not leave their homes on the Sabbath or attend services in a synagogue. So, the religious leaders found a solution to that problem in the form of what they named *eru-*

vin. An *eruv* is a shortened variant of the Hebrew term *eruv hazerot*, which basically means the mixing of domains.

The *eruv* can be compared to walls, fences, and other boundaries, and they often take the form of a wire mounted on poles. You would probably never notice these wires in Jewish communities because they are usually placed at about the height of a light pole. For observant Jews, the *eruv* are symbolic boundary lines that define a mixing of their private domain with the public domain. An *eruv* extends the private domain to semi-public or public domains, so that burdens, as defined by rabbinical teaching, can be carried on the Sabbath outside the physical structure of a home—because they are still within the boundaries of the *eruv*.

As long as observant Jews stay within the boundaries of the *eruv*, they are permitted to push a baby carriage or carry food on the Sabbath. The concept of the *eruv* was first established almost 2,000 years ago, demonstrating the influence of the oral law in the first century. Today, the New York borough

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of Manhattan has one of the longest *eruv* in the world. “A nearly invisible wire runs from 126th Street in Harlem, down to Battery Park and back up to 111th [street] along the East River” (“The Manhattan Eruv,” *AltasObscura.com*, 2017). That *eruv* has been in place since 1905, as part of a contractual agreement between the city of New York and the Jewish community. Clearly, the Jewish community takes these extra-biblical laws very seriously, and therefore Jesus and the disciples were constantly taken to task for their actions on the Sabbath.

Another prohibition of the 39 *melachot* is kindling a fire on the Sabbath; this is *Ma’avir*, the thirty-seventh prohibition. This means that for observant Jews, turning on light switches or lighting a burner or stove is considered by rabbinical teaching as violating the Sabbath. Again, observant Jews have devised workarounds to accommodate this prohibition because they value the commands in the 39 *melachot* as much as—or even more than—they do the law of God. Burners are ignited before the Sabbath begins and a special metal cover is placed on the burner so food can be heated up during the Sabbath. Lights are turned on before the Sabbath or controlled by an automatic timer. The light in the refrigerator needs to be disabled for the Sabbath so that opening the refrigerator door doesn’t turn on the light. Appliance manufacturers even make Sabbath-compliant stoves and refrigerators.

In Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which is home to a large Jewish population, there are a few public housing developments that are mainly populated by observant Jews; Independence Towers is one of them. The elevator in this building has a special controller that causes the elevator to automatically stop on every floor; it is activated before every Sabbath, so the observant Jews in the building don’t have to push any buttons to leave and enter the elevator on the Sabbath. Residents simply stand there and wait for the elevator to open on their floor, and when they get in, wait for it to stop at the floor where they want to get off. Independence Towers has 23 stories—so, as you can imagine, it could take 20 minutes or more to get out of the building using the elevator on the Sabbath.

A Release from the Burden of Working Around Burdens

Now, why did the Jewish teachers and rabbis add these extra prohibitions regarding the Sabbath? No doubt their motives were sincere in wanting to protect and safeguard the Torah commandments by building a “fence” around them. But, as you can see in the account of Jesus’ disciples and the heads of grain, human reasoning did get out of hand. While most observant Jews would deny that these oral laws and the 39 *melachot* are an unnecessary burden, what we find is that rabbinical teaching has es-

tablished many ways to circumvent these prohibitions to make it easier for Jews to maintain the normal activities of life. Jesus Christ understood the burden imposed by the traditions, saying that “they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matthew 23:4).

Had Jesus violated the commandments, we would not have a Savior, and the Apostle Paul stated, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Numerous times, Jesus was challenged by the Pharisees and others in response to something He or His disciples did on the Sabbath—like healing people. Yet Jesus Christ never violated God’s Sabbath command, nor did He ever endorse His disciples doing so. He did break several of the oral traditions and extra-biblical prohibitions—human-made laws—that were eventually codified in the 39 *melachot* of the Talmud. However, doing so did not constitute sin, which is the violation of God’s laws (1 John 3:4).

Men can’t “out-righteous” God. He gave us a complete law, codified in Scripture’s commandments and statutes, that illuminates His very mind—so that we, in turn, can learn to make wise decisions in our walk before Him. No code or interpretation of man can ever improve upon what God has given for our teaching and guidance. (LW)



How to Fast

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

By **Jonathan McNair**

For a follower of Christ, studying the Bible is crucial, and spending time communicating with God in prayer is vital. But there is another essential practice that we should not ignore. In fact, this component of the Christian’s life enhances and increases the effectiveness of both prayer and Bible study. The Bible refers to it as fasting.

Although fasting is not a common practice for most people today, Christ anticipated that His followers would fast. We read that Christ was questioned about fasting, and why His disciples were not practicing it. His questioners asked, “Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” Jesus replied, “Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.” But then Jesus added, “But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days” (Mark 2:18–20). There is a purpose for fasting, and faithful followers of Christ will make this practice a part of their lives.

But why is fasting important? And how should we fast? Is there a right way and a wrong way? What are we trying to accomplish when we fast? How can we fast effectively? And how do we get started?

Fasting and the Day of Atonement

For the typical person called into the Body of Christ, the Day of Atonement is an introduction to the practice of fasting. We are told that “the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD” (Leviticus 23:27). Over the next few verses, the term “afflict your souls” is repeated two more times.

How did they afflict their souls? David wrote, “I humbled myself with fasting” (Psalm 35:13). The Hebrew word David used, translated in the *NKJV* as “humbled,” is the same word that is translated “afflict” in Leviticus 23. In David’s case, however, he simply states what was understood to be the way to accomplish this action of afflicting or humbling oneself—fasting.

Much later, Isaiah quoted the Israelites’ complaint against God. Collectively, the nation of Israel said, “Why have we fasted... and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?” (Isaiah 58:3). Isaiah went on to berate them for the fact that their show of humility lacked substance. But, again, we see that fasting was understood to humble oneself before God.

But how, exactly, should we fast?

The Physical Aspect

Strictly speaking, a complete fast involves abstaining from both food and water. This is how Moses described his 40-day fast. “When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water” (Deuteronomy 9:9). Esther asked her fellow Jews to fast for three days and nights as she prepared to face the king. She said, “Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise” (Esther 4:16).

Esther and her compatriots fasted for three days. Moses, Elijah, and later Jesus Christ fasted for 40 days. But except for the Day of Atonement, when we are specifically commanded to fast for one day, the length of the fast is not defined for us. What matters is the way we fast.

Afflicting Ourselves

In the account of the showdown between Elijah and the priests of Baal, we read that the priests inflicted pain upon themselves. “So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them” (1 Kings 18:28). There are a variety of explanations as to why they did this, all centered on pleasing their god. This practice of self-brutalization has continued through the centuries, even becoming part of the practices of counterfeit Christianity. Self-flagellation, self-castration, and even self-crucifixion have been done under the misguided notion that such actions would be pleasing to God. But this is not what God expects of us, and it is not what fasting is about.

So, what is the point of fasting?

God designed our bodies to need a regular intake of both food and water to function well. Food gives us energy, builds our cells, and maintains the complex system of our human body. Water is an essential substance for life, and the most important building block of cells. On average, the human body is more than 50 percent water, and we need water to live. Yet our bodies can survive for some time without eating or drinking. But it is not pleasant.

When we go without food and water, we are uncomfortable. When we don’t eat, our energy sags. We become weak and listless, and we are physically humbled as our body weakens. This humbling, an experience we willingly and purposefully endure, helps to teach us—not punish us or inflict intentional pain. In fact, unlike self-torturing behaviors, well-attested findings affirm that reasonable fasting helps our bodies in a variety of ways.

And under the effect of fasting, we begin to feel weak. That’s where the spiritual connection comes in.

The Spiritual Aspect

If we take a step back, we’re reminded that one of God’s primary goals in working with us is to help us to grow in spiritual humility. When He worked with ancient Israel, God plainly included this as part of His “mission statement.” We read that He reminded the Israelites that “you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not” (Deuteronomy 8:2). He reminded them that He was the One “who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end” (Deuteronomy v. 16).

Later, He inspired Isaiah to write, “For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones’” (Isaiah 57:15).

Plainly, God wants us to develop a mindset of humility. But why?

Humble people have a willingness to learn what they lack. They see their shortcomings. They see that everything doesn’t revolve around them, their point of view, their opinion, or their comfort. Humility is an antidote to selfishness, and a mindset of humility is a mindset of reality.

When with purposeful intent we choose to abstain from food and drink for a period of time, we cannot help but feel weaker physically—we are reminded of our vulnerability and our need for nourishment. And, as we go through this process, God can help us to recognize our spiritual need as well. We need God’s words to strengthen us. We need God’s Spirit to guide us. And we need communication with God to help us. As James wrote, “He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’... Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:6, 10).

The Right Attitude for Fasting

Ironically, the practice of fasting can lead to the very attitude that fasting is meant to help us overcome.

Christ gave a parable with an important warning: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess’” (Luke 18:10–12). The grand irony in this parable is that the Pharisee saw his practice of fasting as a mark of his goodness instead of learning the lesson of humility. He missed the point of fasting.

We find the same malady in God’s rebuke of ancient Israel and Judah. Isaiah reprovved people who fasted to appear righteous, not to grow in humility before God. He wrote:

In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high.... Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isaiah 58:4–7).

Their practice of fasting was an empty show. Instead of fasting in humility to take on the mind of God, their actions showed

that they had very little respect for God. Even His Sabbath day was treated with carelessness and disdain (cf. vv. 13–14).

What is the danger of fasting? That it becomes a mark of vanity, instead of a vehicle for learning humility.

How to Fast

Fundamentally, to fast is to abstain from ingesting food or liquids for a period of time. Modern health experts often advocate “intermittent fasting” or “juice fasting,” or other variations of fasting. These certainly may be beneficial in terms of improving our physical health, but that is not the point of a fast that is intended to draw us closer to God in humility. If we simply abstain from food or drink for a day and do not spend a significant portion of that day in prayer, Bible study, and meditation, then we might improve our physical health, but we have done nothing to improve our relationship with God.

Here’s how Dr. Roderick Meredith explained it:

Prayer and fasting go together. There was a time when the prophet Daniel really, desperately wanted to know what would happen in the future: “Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes” (Daniel 9:3). Prayer always goes along with fasting.

Daniel went on: “And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, ‘O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned...’” (vv. 4–5). Notice he did not say, “Oh, we’ve been good, and we’ve done no wrong, and You don’t have any right to punish us.”

Rather, he told God he was sorry, and that “we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.... Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face” (vv. 5, 7) (“By Prayer and Fasting...,” *TomorrowsWorld.org*, February 16, 2017).

As Dr. Meredith explained, Daniel wholeheartedly sought God through a combination of prayer and fasting. For us, taking a day to devote ourselves to really digging into God’s word, praying, and meditating, while abstaining from food and drink, can be energizing. It can give us spiritual strength that we desperately need to confront life’s challenges. Fasting for a day on a regular basis over the course of the year can be a real tonic for our Christian development.

What about fasting on the Sabbath? There is no specific command against it—and, of course, when Jesus, Moses, and Elijah each fasted for 40 days, those periods had to include some Sabbaths. At the same time, when we consider the

larger purpose of the Sabbath, making that day our “regular” fast day presents challenges. The time we spend traveling, sitting in services, and fellowshiping, as we should on the Sabbath, can take away from the focus of our fast—and we certainly won’t be able to accept or offer any invitations to “break bread” after services. While an occasional fast on the Sabbath can be fine, we should be wary of making it our habitual “go to” fast day.

From time to time, our Presiding Evangelist will call a Church-wide fast—much as Esther asked of her brethren—and often uses the Sabbath for this purpose. In these cases, the benefit of hearing a common message and fellowshiping with others who are fasting for the same purpose outweighs other concerns and makes the day an ideal choice.

What about a water fast? Again, generally speaking, a true fast is abstaining from food and drink, including water. Yet there is some debate as to whether every instance of fasting in the Bible included abstinence from water. In a 1948 coworker letter, Mr. Herbert Armstrong acknowledged that a fast in which only water was consumed could be appropriate, particularly if the fast lasted longer than one day.

Finally, what about health concerns? Some people have conditions that cause them to question whether they can do a fast, such as those with blood sugar problems, mothers who are pregnant or nursing, or those who need to take regular medication. When needed, wise measures can be taken while still preserving the spirit and intent of the fast. Your local pastor will be happy to counsel with you about such circumstances.

Creating a Mindset for Growth

Setting our mind to spend a day fasting—alongside our prayer, Bible study, and meditation—is a commitment that requires us to sacrifice our time and our effort. But isn’t that what we’re supposed to be doing? This is what the Apostle Peter exhorted his audience. He wrote, “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble” (2 Peter 1:10). He then wrote later in the same letter, “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14).

Diligence, effort, sacrifice—these are what we must practice if we seek to follow Christ.

In preparation for facing Satan, the ruler of this world, Christ fasted for 40 days—certainly longer than any of us have ever fasted. As the Son of God, He recognized the importance of fasting to draw close to His Father. He knew that having His Father’s strength was imperative for His success. Are we willing to focus our attention on drawing closer to God by dedicating a day from time to time to afflict our bodies through fasting—supplemented by prayer, Bible study, and meditation? If we follow in the footsteps of Christ, we will be. (LW)

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. Wyatt (Tess) Ciesielka celebrated their **30th wedding anniversary** in June. They were married on June 13, 1993, by the bride's father, Pastor Keith Walden. After graduating from Ambassador College, they lived in Austin, Texas, where they were blessed with two daughters, Chloe and Kezia. Mr. Ciesielka has served in the ministry since 2008, and he and his wife now reside in the Raleigh, North Carolina, area.

Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey (Christine) Edwards, of the Wade-bridge congregation in the United Kingdom, celebrated their **50th wedding anniversary** on January 29. A bouquet of flowers and warm congratulations were sent to the much-loved couple on behalf of the congregation.

On Wednesday, April 19, **Mr. Anthony Greenlaw** of the Waterville, Maine, congregation, and **Ms. Gina McCauley** of the Temple, Texas, congregation, were joined in marriage at the Silo and Oak wedding venue by New England Area Pastor Michael Aviles. Forty friends, family, and brethren witnessed the beautiful ceremony. Despite the threat of inclement weather, the skies cleared and the day turned out to provide perfect weather for an outdoor wedding. Mr. and Mrs. Greenlaw attend the Temple, Texas, congregation.

Mr. Benjamin Smith and **Ms. Isabell DeSimone** were married on Monday, June 12, by Area Pastor John Strain. Their wedding and reception took place at the lovely William R. Davie park, where over a hundred family members, friends, and brethren witnessed their union as husband and wife. Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Smith attend the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Michael (Michelle) Grovak celebrated their **25th wedding anniversary** on June 28 and spent a week at the historic and beautiful West Baden Springs Hotel in French Lick, Indiana. During their stay, three of their eight children and two of their sons-in-law hosted a surprise dinner party at the resort's restaurant. Mr. Grovak is an elder serving in the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation.

Mr. Everett (Rett) McNair and **Ms. Hayley Ardis** were united in marriage on June 25 in a beautiful outdoor venue in Monck's Corner, South Carolina. The groom's father, Evangelist Jonathan McNair, performed the ceremony. Many friends and family members witnessed the happy couple make their covenant with God and each other and celebrated the joyous occasion. Mr. and Mrs. Everett McNair attend the Garden Grove, California, congregation.

After Sabbath services on April 1, the Perth congregation in Australia surprised **Mr. and Mrs. Chris (Michelle) Pressler** with a gift and a cake in honor of their **40th wedding anniversary**. The congregation enjoyed being able to celebrate this happy milestone with Mr. and Mrs. Pressler.

On May 11, **Mr. and Mrs. Dayrell (Jeanette) Tanner** were blessed to be able to celebrate their **60th wedding anniversary**. The Brisbane congregation was pleased to be able to honor the occasion after services on May 6. With good examples of loving marriages more and more rare in today's society, it is a blessing to be able to learn from the Tanners' excellent example. The congregation presented Mr. and Mrs. Tanner with a small gift, and all shared a special afternoon tea together.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Jacob (Julia) Boyer are happy to announce the arrival of their son, **Mario Jacob Gabriel Boyer**, who was born July 24. He measured 20-and-a-half inches long and weighed 8 pounds and 10 ounces. Although six days past his due date, labor was quick, and he now shares the same birth date as his sister Emmeline! The Jacob Boyer family attend the Gaffney, South Carolina, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Bill (Deb) Morton are happy to announce the arrival of their new son, **Jack William Morton**, who was born April 13. He measured 49 centimeters in length and weighed 3.1 kilograms (6.8 pounds). Mother and baby are doing well. The Mortons attend the Adelaide congregation in South Australia.

In Loving Memory

Mr. Gregory O'Neil All, 68, died December 19, 2022. He was born October 29, 1954. Mr. All attended the Walterboro, South Carolina, congregation with his wife Charleen and adult son Kevin. He worked for many years as a locomotive engineer for Southern Railway, until an injury prevented him from continuing his career. He was known as a very generous and kind individual. He loved woodworking and canning vegetables alongside his wife. He also enjoyed flying kites to tremendous heights. Mr. All is survived by his wife, Charleen Deborah All, and by their son, Kevin Gregory All.

Mrs. Anne Chwalek, 90, died on June 18. She was a member of the Fort Wayne, Indiana, congregation, and was the oldest member in the Indiana congregations. She is survived by Bruce, her husband of 44 years—a deacon and longtime member—and a loving daughter and son-in-law. Baptized in 1972, Mrs. Chwalek set a sterling example of faith and commitment to God's way of life. She was very active until the last couple years and enjoyed planting flowers and maintaining a small vegetable garden wherever possible. A hallmark of her life was her willingness to serve and give to others. Whether volunteering in First Aid at the Feast, having brethren over for food and fellowship, or serving the disadvantaged within her local community, she often sought out ways to give of herself. Despite suffering two cardiac arrests in March of this year, she was looking forward to attending the Feast this fall. All who knew her will have wonderful memories and will miss her warmth, grace, and friendly smile.

Mrs. Cherry Copeland, 59, died on July 4 after many years of serious health trials. A longtime member, she was known for her infectious smile and persistent positivity, setting a tremendous example of perseverance and courage through trials. She enjoyed refurbishing furniture, decorating, tending to her flower gardens, and sewing. Mrs. Copeland was loved by all who knew her and will be greatly missed, certainly by the Memphis, Tennessee, congregation, where she attended.

Mr. John Clifton Davis, 90, a member of the Little Rock, Arkansas, congregation, died on December 23. The oldest of ten children, he grew up with an amazing work ethic, which served him well as a farmer with his own large family. He loved the land and his neighbors, generously sharing his expertise in farming and the bounty of his produce. Mr. Davis began attending God's Church in 1976 and remained faithful during difficult times in the Church. Though he suffered various health problems and the infirmities of age, his indomi-

table positive attitude was an inspiration to all. His stories of his early life and experiences will be treasured by his family and friends. Mr. Davis is survived by his five children, twelve grandchildren, and fifteen great-grandchildren. Area Pastor Phil West and Pastor Davy Crockett conducted his funeral on December 28.

Mr. Karl Heitmann, 94, died peacefully in his sleep on July 17. Born in 1929 in Hamburg, Germany, he reached his teens during World War II. In 1952 he left Germany to work in Australia on a two-year apprenticeship with the railroad, and in 1960 he became a naturalized Australian citizen. Mr. Heitmann later moved to the United States and married Shirley Kennebeck in 1977. He was baptized in 1964 and ordained a deacon in 2014, serving in the Dallas, Texas, congregation. Mr. Heitmann was determined to be at church services every week as long as he was able. He is survived by a son and a daughter and their families in Australia and by six stepsons and their families in the United States. Mr. Heitmann was a kind and generous man, and he is greatly missed by many.

Mr. Booker T. Holmes, 87, died peacefully on December 8 with his wife and family close by. Mr. Holmes was born August 20, 1935, in Graniteville, South Carolina, the youngest of 13 siblings. When asked how he was doing, the response was always, "Fantastic!" Mr. Holmes, affectionately known as "BT" and "Mr. Fantastic," had a vibrant zeal for God. He was baptized in 2018 and attended and served faithfully in the Augusta, Georgia, congregation, along with his wife, Martha. Mr. Holmes had an amazing number of hobbies and interests along with a skillset that enabled him to build many projects for his family and others. Besides his wife of 20 years, Martha, he is survived by nine children and a host of grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great-great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and cousins.

Mrs. Nell Lyons, 86, died peacefully in her sleep on Friday evening, March 24, surrounded by her husband of 68 years, all of her children, and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Baptized in 1968, she was a longtime member of God's Church and served as a deaconess and as an elder's wife for several decades. Mrs. Lyons was born in 1936 in Smoaks, South Carolina, the youngest of nine children. She met the love of her life, Lehman Lyons, while they were both attending Smoaks High School in the early 1950s, and they were married on May 28, 1954. During high school she was active

in the 4-H club, Beta Club, Junior Homemakers of America, and as a Song Leader and Assistant Director of the Glee Club. Most of all she loved being a member of the basketball team. Mrs. Lyons was a devoted wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and great-great-grandmother, who dearly loved her family. Her true love and legacy was serving brethren and loving and caring for her husband and their four children, eleven grandchildren, nineteen great-grandchildren, and five great-great-grandchildren. She is greatly missed by all, certainly including the Walterboro, South Carolina, congregation, where she attended.

Mrs. Yvette Masset, 93, died on March 11. She was baptized in 1992 and was a beloved member of the congregation in Belgium. She will be remembered for her kindness and her humor. Mrs. Masset was predeceased by her husband, Roger, who died in the faith 20 years ago. Her family is grateful for the friendship between their mother and the brethren.

Mrs. Mieke Raymakers, 95, died on March 1 with her family by her side. Mrs. Raymakers was a longtime member of God's Church, baptized in 1972, and attended the Melbourne congregation in Australia. In her early life, she was a psychiatric and home care nurse for 18 years in the Netherlands and the Caribbean. She moved to Australia in the early 1960s to marry Joseph Raymakers, who predeceased her in 2015. Mrs. Raymakers was a Proverbs 31 wife, devoted mother of five children, and much-loved sister in God's Church. Her life

exemplified Matthew 25:35–40, and she brought great joy to many over her long life. She is survived by her five children, 17 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Mr. Bobby Gene “Bob” Shaw, 64, died December 27. Mr. Shaw, born and reared in Arkansas, was baptized in 1980 and attended the Little Rock, Arkansas, congregation. He is survived by his wife Terri, his mother, a brother, and a sister. Mr. Shaw was an entrepreneur, operating a recycling company in central Arkansas for many years. He was a hardworking man and a dedicated, faithful member of God's Church who quietly served his family, his brethren, and his fellow man. A gentle giant, his rich baritone voice and unmistakable laugh will be missed by all who knew him. Mr. Davy Crockett conducted his funeral service on January 6.

Mrs. Marion Wilneff, 96, died on June 10. Baptized in 1986, she was a longtime member of God's Church and a member of the Halifax, Nova Scotia, congregation. Mrs. Wilneff made friends wherever she went, and her generous smile and pleasant nature were attractive to everyone she met. Even through difficult periods, she demonstrated quiet determination, courage, strength, hopefulness, and a sense of humor. She loved reading her Bible, watching nature, and being with her loved ones. Mrs. Wilneff was predeceased by her beloved husband of 61 years. They had two children, three grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Mr. Frank Best conducted her funeral service.

Ordinations

Mrs. Sally Crouch was ordained a deaconess on the Sabbath of April 8 by Director of Church Administration Douglas Winnail, Australasian Regional Director Rob Tyler, Area Pastor Anthony Mew, and Pastor Dayrell Tanner. Mrs. Crouch serves in the Brisbane, Queensland, congregation, where her husband serves as a deacon.

Mr. Phillip Johnson was ordained an elder on Pentecost by Pastor Rick Stafford and elder Dan Dever. Mr. Johnson serves in the Baytown, Texas, congregation.



TITUS 2:3-5

Woman to Woman

Training Our Children for Sabbath Worship

By Dinah Winnail

Parenting children is one of the great challenges of life. For Christians, this includes not only the necessities of daily life, but also the “training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). We are to teach our children about God’s law, His ways, and His expectations for how we worship Him and treat others. In the same way that our children must be taught to use eating utensils, we must teach them how to behave in God’s presence at Sabbath services.

And we *are* in God’s presence during Sabbath services. That time belongs to Him and requires special behavior of all who are present. Just as we dress differently when we come before God, we should also behave differently than we do every other day. As attention spans shrink, teaching our children to be attentive and respectful during Sabbath services is ever more challenging—and ever more important. I see parents trying very hard to do this, and I know it is not an easy task.

Perhaps a little encouragement from those who have already walked that path can be helpful. I write as a mother who struggled to help her own children learn, and I hope to encourage you that you and your children *will* get there—given time, patience, and practice.

Why do we want children to be quiet and still during Sabbath services? If it is just so that we can hear the messages, then our reasoning is incomplete, because we are not the only ones called by God. He tells us that the promise is also for our children (Acts 2:39). Yes, we do want our children to learn to be quiet in services. But, more importantly, we want them to learn to revere God and to honor Him on His Sabbath day. It is good for very young children to learn to be quiet because that is what Mommy or Daddy tell them to do. But, as they grow in maturity, having been taught to listen quietly and pay attention, they begin learning His ways on a deeper level and drawing closer to Him, able to choose to live His way for themselves.

So, what steps can we take to help them?

A Child’s Place in Services

First, we work to teach them to be quiet. I say *work* to teach them because, if they are very young, it is a *process*. When I

had babies, older and wiser women told me that 18 months seemed to be the age when children could really start to comprehend their training. I found this to be generally true for my children. Much younger than that age, we do what we can, but we must be willing to take them out of services if they are disruptive and cannot understand what is expected of them.

Parents show love to their brethren when they remove noisy little ones from services so that others can hear the service. In small congregations that meet in small rooms, it can become impossible to hear the messages. It is understandable that the parents don’t want to miss the sermon, but the season of life when we have babies is temporary—during that time, we can ask God’s help to profit from the sermons we are not able to hear in their entirety. I remember vividly each sermon that I heard from start to finish when my children were small, because it was such a rare occurrence. It helps if babies can nap during services, but this isn’t always realistic. When my children were small, we were in different locations each week at different meeting times with long car rides to get there. That was just our reality as a family.

We parents get used to a certain level of noise from our children. We function daily in that noise and cease to notice it. That is not the case, though, for our brethren. So, we must show love for them, too, by removing our disruptive little ones until they can calm and quiet down. Notice, I did not say “teach them to whisper.” Sometimes, whispering can be almost as loud as speaking. So, we as parents must use discretion. I taught “no talking” during Sabbath services, but if my children absolutely had to ask me something, that was the time to whisper quietly. It is a good idea to practice whispering during the week—Church services are not the place to teach it. We need to teach our children that during Sabbath services they do not speak to us in the same voice they use before or after services or at home.

Another aspect of training is to provide a mat or blanket for the floor where a child can have his or her space. I taught my children that the appropriate place for them to be during services is either on their mat or in a chair. This gave them clear boundaries and reinforced that they should not be wandering around the room while services are in progress. It is also good to have some quiet “Sabbath-only” toys they can

look forward to playing with each week. It may even be helpful to have enough to rotate them out of the Sabbath bag from time to time to keep their interest.

But be careful here. One of my children could find a way to make noise with almost any toy, so it was a challenge until we had that child fully trained. Some helpful items may be soft sided-books, coloring books, stuffed animals, and the like. I tried to provide toys that would help focus on God and His creation, too. For instance, my children had a soft-sided No-

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ah's ark with little stuffed animals, as well as coloring books and picture books about God's creation. The goals here are to help children learn the difference between the Sabbath and the other six days of the week, while also making the Sabbath a delight for us all.

Training Begins at Home, Not at Church

Perhaps the most important point I can share is that once-a-week Sabbath services *are not* the place to train little ones for Sabbath services. It takes practice—in a time and place where you can pause and instruct. I would practice with my children several times during the week at home.

Starting small, I got out their mats and a few Sabbath toys—varying them each time to keep it fresh—and I played a sermon on the television. Before we started, I explained to them that we were going to “practice church.” I let them know

what I expected, and we started. I would continue only as long as the children could play or rest quietly. At first it was sometimes five minutes or ten minutes, but over time it became a half-hour and then longer. Once they can make it for a whole sermon at home, you know they understand. It may even be helpful to practice at home at approximately the same time as the weekly Sabbath service. I always followed this practice time with a reward that my children appreciated. And I also let them know that it made God happy, too, when they did

well. I worked to make practice time a positive experience for them and only practiced each day for as long as they could be quiet and still.

If you know parents in the Church who have already reared their children, you could ask them for other suggestions, too. What works for one family or child may not work for another.

And, if your congregation is blessed to have other children, be sure to teach your children that they should not talk to their friends *during* services. Playing with and talking to friends is a reward for after services—because, of course, our children need fellowship, too.

Finally, the key is to keep trying—asking God to guide you to the best ways of training that will work for you and your family. Practicing for Sabbath services is not convenient, but it is an investment in the spiritual health of our families. It is an act of faith and service to our heavenly Father and His Son, who have offered us a gift greater than we can comprehend—in which They want our children to share.

Even from Their Youth

Training children to worship God on His Sabbath day is an important part of parenting. It is important for our children and their relationship with God, and it shows our love for our brethren. It is also an investment in our own spiritual health; parents of small children know well the absolute luxury of hearing an entire sermon on the Sabbath.

Success *is* possible—it just takes dedication, consistency, and practice. Years ago, I was walking around a hotel lobby one Sabbath, struggling with an unhappy baby, when an older man in our congregation approached me, looked into my eyes with great care, and said, “There is no more important thing that you can be doing as a mother than teaching your little ones how to worship God on His Sabbath day.” I needed those words that day. I hope they can help encourage you, too. (LM)



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How Swift Are Your Feet?

The Bible reveals profound truths about what God loves and what He hates. For example, He declares seven things that are utter abominations to Him, one of which is “feet that are swift in running to evil” (Proverbs 6:16–19). If He hates these, then we can understand that He loves their opposites. What would those be?

Feet that are *slow* in running to evil would still be moving toward evil, and a slow fall to sin is still sin. Rather, the opposite would be feet that are swift in running to *good*. Jesus Christ gave us many examples of doing good—and all of them, in one way or another, come back to service. We should always be on the lookout for opportunities to practice servant leadership, even if grasping these opportunities can be daunting.

Years ago, I found a unique opportunity to serve some shut-ins living in my Church area. In the process of this, one began writing me letters every month or so—I’d had to mail some things to this elderly lady, and she simply used my return address. It started off as questions about me, the local congregation, events going on in the world, and so on. Through the course of our dialogue, she offered me an experienced perspective and some much-needed encouragement.

A couple of weeks before the Spring Holy Days last year, I received a letter from this lady, but I procrastinated on responding. I had my excuses, but how long would it have taken to sit down and write a letter? The weeks went by, and on the first Day of Unleavened Bread, I learned that this lady had died a week before. It hit me like a slap in the face. This elder sister in Christ had been homebound and alone—and my sitting down to write that letter could have served and encour-

aged her in the last days of her race. But my feet had not been swift to do good.

We read, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). What was His example? “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42–45).

I once heard it said, “If you come to the Feast expecting a feast, you will go home disappointed. But if you come to the Feast to *give* a feast, you will have the best Feast of your life.” No matter who you are, you can find a way to serve at the Feast this year. Kids, you can ask your parents for advice on ways to serve. Perhaps you can volunteer to help with door greeting or at the Family Day event. Parents, if your child is looking for a way to serve others, encourage and nurture that desire. Your encouragement is also service.

If you struggle with physical activity, most Feast sites send cards to shut-ins who would love to hear from you. That, too, is service. Maybe the business office needs help. Maybe you can share a meal with somebody who has come alone to the Feast. You may be surprised at what you’ll learn and the friendship it can bring.

Regardless of your situation, find a way to serve. Service can be as complex as hosting an activity for your local congregation, or as simple as sending letters of encouragement to someone who needs them. How swift are your feet?

—James Mooney