

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

LCG.org

November-December 2026

God Is Testing Us

Dear Brethren,

Most of us think of Hezekiah as a good king, yet we also read that he had weaknesses. God gave him great wealth and success, and Hezekiah's heart was apparently lifted up as a result. Eventually, when ambassadors from Babylon came to Hezekiah, "God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chronicles 32:31).

Indeed, the Bible shows that God is constantly testing His people, working with each of us in ways that we do not always understand. Can we see the big picture of what God is doing with and through us—enough to accept and embrace the tests that He sends our way?

We know that God does not tempt anyone (James 1:13), but He does give us choices (Deuteronomy 30:19). Sometimes tests come because of something sinful or foolish we have done. Other times, God simply knows that He must allow certain things to happen to us to build our character. In the case of Job, He allowed Satan to unwittingly help Him bring about a specific result. Job had a spiritual problem that needed to be dealt with, and God loved him enough to give him the tests he needed.

God tested the Israelites constantly in the wilderness to see if they were going to obey Him or not. "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.... You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you" (Deuteronomy 8:3–5).

Though God allowed these trials, He planned from the beginning to give Israel something wonderful at the end:

"For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land.... a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you" (vv. 7–10). We face certain tests when times are difficult, but when things are going smoothly—without any trials or difficulties—that's sometimes the greatest test of all. We see this in the lives of many kings, such as Solomon and Hezekiah; when they had prosperity, their hearts were changed. It is always God who gives or allows wealth, and He tells us to be careful not to forget that.

Tests We All Face

We read of one test that God gave the Israelites: "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not'" (Exodus 16:4). God's law was already in effect—He just wanted to know if they would obey it.

The Sabbath command is still a test for us today. When we first come into the knowledge of the Sabbath, it means adjusting our habits. But for some, it's more than just adjusting habits—it's losing a job or at least putting a job on the line.

And it's a test not only of keeping the Sabbath, but of understanding it. God has made that time holy, and we must keep it in a holy manner. Will we use God's time the way He wants us to use it? That is a test for every one of us.

Another test is how we use our resources. God asked through Malachi, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes

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and offerings” (Malachi 3:8). God gives us that test also. He says, *I want 10 percent from you, because you’re living on My land*. But people want to hang on to their resources. There are even those in God’s Church who don’t tithe properly—or at all. *That is a problem*. The promise that we made at baptism was to keep God’s commandments, and one of the Ten Commandments is “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15). Can there be any greater theft than stealing from God?

God also tests us on what we believe. Why does He allow Satan to be on the earth? To see which way we’re going to go. We read:

If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, “Let us go after other gods”—which you have not known—“and let us serve them,” you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 13:1–3).

Many fell away during the apostasy of the Worldwide Church of God. Many had faced apostasy before and passed those tests—but when it came from the top, when the leader began to apostatize, that was a different kind of test. Are the laws of God and the ways of God truly in our hearts? Or do we obey them only because we are told to? God tests us on what we believe, how deeply we believe it, and whether or not we will put Him first.

Another test involves marriage and family: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate [put Christ first, far above] his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). Do we put family before God? God told Abraham to slay his son, and He is telling you and me not to literally slay our family members, but to put them in second place. He is to be first in *everything*.

Remember the Big Picture

How we handle these tests when they come is all-important. We read that David wanted God to test him: “Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my mind and my heart” (Psalm 26:2). David also wrote, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23–24). How many of us are willing to ask God to test whether there is evil in our hearts? Jeremiah, too, wanted God to help him to understand himself more: “O LORD, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing” (Jeremiah 10:24).

What is the big picture? Why does God test us? Because He wants us in His Kingdom, in His family. The trials that come upon us are all for the purpose of helping us inherit what God has in mind for us—a reward far greater than we imagine.

No matter how severe, those trials will come to an end, and there will be a day of rejoicing at the return of Jesus Christ. “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love” (1 Peter 1:6–8).

Sometimes people think that if we pray about something, God will *make* us make the right decision. But if that were the case, how would He ever know what’s truly in our hearts? Though He showed Hezekiah great favor, God didn’t make every decision for him, and God is not going to make every decision for you and me. He may move us in a certain direction in response to our prayers, but He wants to know what is in our hearts, and we reveal that through our actions.

God has a great purpose for those who put Him first in their lives. Let us remember the big picture and, instead of running from them, embrace the tests that come our way.



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

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

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EDITORIAL By Gerald E. Weston

Simple, but Not Easy

Our youth camps give evidence that we have a terrific group of young people in the Living Church of God. No, they are not perfect. They have typical preteen and teenage insecurities and are still trying to figure out how they fit into the grand scheme of things, but most are respectful, caring, and striving to do the right thing. There are occasional exceptions—and we know that they act differently when around adults than among their peers—but many are doing better than we did at the same age. We can be thankful for that!

That said, influence from others is a powerful force working on teens as they seek acceptance from those around them. Peer pressure plays on fears of being ostracized or made fun of. This is not new. We all went through it and—if we are introspective and honest with ourselves—we must acknowledge that we often are still powerfully influenced by our peers. Adults are swayed by those around them, as well as by their children's constant requests and demands. Parenting is not easy, and saying no—and sticking with it—is sometimes difficult.

New technologies in the last 15 years, pushed along by peer pressure, have drastically changed our world. Creators of electronic media platforms use powerful addictive techniques to hold us on their sites as long as possible, for one reason only—money. As Facebook founder Sean Parker confessed with regret in an *Axios* interview:

When Facebook was getting going, I had these people who would come up to me and they would say, "I'm not on social media." And I would say, "OK. You know, you will be." And then they would say, "No... I value my real-life interactions. I value the moment. I value presence. I value intimacy." And I would say... "We'll get you eventually." ... I don't know if I really understood the consequences of what I was saying, because [of] the unintended consequences of a network when it grows to a billion or 2 billion people and... it literally changes your relationship with society, with each other.... It probably interferes with productivity in weird ways. God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains.... The thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them... was all about: "*How do*

we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?" ... And that means that we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever. And that's going to get you to contribute more content, and that's going to get you... more likes and comments.... It's a social-validation feedback loop... exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology.... The inventors, creators—it's me, it's Mark [Zuckerberg], it's Kevin Systrom on Instagram, it's all of these people—understood this consciously. And we did it anyway ("Sean Parker unloads on Facebook: 'God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains,'" *Axios.com*, November 9, 2017, emphasis added).

More than one early creator of these platforms has expressed regrets and would like to turn back time—but, as the children's nursery rhyme goes, Humpty Dumpty is broken and cannot be put back together again. The result is that a huge percentage of our children are addicted to these devices. During one Christian Living class at camp this past summer, Mr. Everett McNair pointed to studies showing that the average teen spends three to five hours a day on social media. Think of how much better they could use that time!

Sadly, even many of us adults are addicted to social media as well, while also being in denial. Few are willing to admit it, and fewer still are willing to do something about it—just as the smoker or alcoholic refuses to admit he has a problem. So, if we seek to justify our habit, how can we blame our children who spend, on average, between three and five hours a day glued to their feeds?

This is not the first article we have published on the subject, nor do we have only one sermon addressing this problem. Alarm bells regarding the misuse of cellphones and social media were sounded not long after the majority of teens possessed smartphones, which seems to have occurred around the mid-2010s. The March-April 2018 *Tomorrow's World* magazine included an article advising us to "Tame the Social Media Monster," asking, "Is it Time to 'De-Friend' Social Media?" Perhaps the some-

what cartoonish cover we chose for that issue did not give the subject the gravity it needed.

This is merely a reminder, a loving exhortation, for all of us to evaluate the path we are walking. As Paul admonished, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15–16). Those are important instructions. We must walk the path of life with our eyes wide open to the influences around us—and we must be wise in the use of our time.

Solomon obviously knew nothing about modern electronic devices, but the principles he taught of guarding our hearts and pondering the paths we walk through life nevertheless apply. “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.... Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil” (Proverbs 4:23, 25–27).

Most of us realize that our world is beset by the problem of how to deal with technologies that offer genuine value but also hold a very dark side. The question is, “What do we do about it?” The plain truth is that any lasting solution to the dangers of misusing social media—and the Internet in general—must come as a *family* solution.

Here are some helpful tips on how to deal with this troublesome issue that is so central to our day-to-day world.

Recognize the Problem

To bring screen time under control in your family, you must first look into the mirror at how you personally use your devices. Many of us spend much of our day looking at screens doing legitimate work. We need these tools to function in our workaday world, and they truly are wonderful helps that enable us to accomplish tasks more efficiently and effectively. However, it is important to be circumspect about our screen time outside of work—whether it is on a computer, smartphone, or television.

Algorithms created by big tech companies evaluate who you are and how best to keep you connected as long as possible. Why? Because then they can advertise to you the very products you are most interested in. If you are into health food, they will know it and cater to you. Funny animal videos? No problem! They will give you not only real animal behaviors, but also made-up, A.I.-generated videos.

The problem we face is that watching a funny or instructive video, whether real or A.I.-generated, is not evil in itself. Which one of us has not watched a humorous video and passed it along to a friend? The problem is the amount of time spent entertaining ourselves with frivolous, unproductive scrolling. Time is life, and too many children—and adults—are scrolling life away. Take a good look in the mirror, be honest

with yourself, and do something about it (James 1:23–26). Jesus’ brother James did not know about modern electronic devices, but the principle of self-examination followed by action applies to life in general. James goes on to explain a better use of our time than endless scrolling: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

Be an Example

It is not good enough to preach to our teens to put down their phones. The starting place is for adults to set an example. For our children’s sake, we must show by *our* actions how to use these new technologies properly—or, maybe better stated, how *not* to use them.

The starting place is to first admit that our own habits may need to be altered. Just as a smoker does not know what to do with his hands when he is not holding a cigarette, many of us feel uncomfortable sitting on a bus, dining out, or waiting for the nurse to call us in to see the doctor unless we are doing something. Our phones are indeed our comfort blankets! We are losing the ability to sit quietly and think and are feeding a growing addiction that is enslaving us.

The sound of pings or vibrations is never far away, piquing our curiosity. It is natural to feel called upon to see who or what it is and to answer right away, dropping everything. Many believe that it is rude not to respond right away or as soon as possible. But is that true? Who set the etiquette rule that one must drop whatever one is doing and immediately acknowledge, reply to, or otherwise continue an endless social media conversation? Obviously, there is a time to respond quickly to an urgent matter, but should we be led around by this dubious convention like a bull with a ring in its nose?

When Lazarus was sick and died, it is interesting that Jesus did not respond by going to him immediately. We understand that there was an important reason—that Jesus waited until everyone was certain of Lazarus’ death—but He felt no pressure to respond right away. We also know that God does not respond to our requests immediately every time we call on Him.

Set Age-Appropriate Limits

In one Topics and Dance evening at our Texas teen camp this year, a teen asked his peers, “How old do you think someone should be before being given a cell phone?” This was anecdotal and a very small sampling, but the answers fell into the 14–15 age range, and one respondent added that a flip phone will suffice for any real needs at that age. But though they commented this way, I wonder how many of them were clamoring for a smartphone a few years earlier.

A couple of years ago, Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* examined the connection between the rise of social media and the measurable rise of anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicide, and other mental health issues worldwide. Among his advice to parents: No smartphones before high school, and no social media before age 16. Some notable authorities recommend that no one under 16 have a personal Internet-connected device at all. But how many fathers hold the line by resisting their children's tears, rants, and comparisons to "all my friends"?

Parenting is tough, and being a single parent must be even more challenging. Sadly, we as adults too often resemble Adam or Samson, who relented to pressure, rather than Joshua, who declared, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). No, it is not easy, but there are things we can do to mitigate the effects of media upon our families.

Institute Family Traditions

Moms and dads must put down their phones and engage their children in more productive and rewarding pursuits. Eating together as a family has been deemphasized over the last half-century. Children often miss eating with the family due

Technological distractions began prior to smartphones. Blaring the television during dinner has been a common habit **for many over the last 70 years.**

to soccer, swimming, baseball, dance, and other extracurricular activities. But which is more important for your vulnerable children—learning organized basketball or maintaining strong relationships with their parents? Balance in this is important, as some outside activities can be valuable, but the course of this world comes at us from many directions.

Technological distractions began prior to smartphones. Blaring the television during dinner has been a common habit for many over the last 70 years. After all, dinnertime is considered time to catch up on the news of the day—somehow, knowing what is happening in the world seems more important than knowing what is happening in the minds of children and spouses. Is solving a *Wheel of Fortune* phrase more important than developing loving relationships among those in our households? Oh, how electronics have changed us as individuals!

Turning off the television is good for our marriages and for our children, as is shutting off our smartphones and Dick Tracy-like super-watches. Shutting them off may seem like a scary adventure, but really—consider how people lived prior

to these inventions. You won't die from turning them off, but you might grow as a family. Other traditions could include turning off notifications after a certain time in the evening, or not checking your phone until after breakfast. If those suggestions seem difficult, to use a Jeff Foxworthy-like expression, "You just might be a smartphone addict." And, again, what did people do before these devices became ubiquitous less than 15 years ago? How did they survive? Really—think about it.

The Apostle Paul explained to the Corinthians that while desires for food and sex are normal and lawful in the right contexts, we must control those desires. "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify" (1 Corinthians 10:23). Earlier, Paul stated something very important: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, *but I will not be brought under the power of any*. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1 Corinthians 6:12–13). Does not the same apply to our use of modern electronics? There is a right use, but we are not to be slaves to them—"not be brought under the power of any."

The list of good family traditions is endless. One might be to set aside one meal each week to discuss how your family can expand its horizons regarding the use of time. Another tradition could be having a family night for games, an outdoor excursion, or other recreational activity, leaving phones behind. What a leap of faith that might be! That is what we do at

our summer camps, and we have clearly seen the benefits that result. Frankly, it is a greater challenge for some parents than for most teens.

Another idea could be to begin a family hobby that involves more than one of you—father and son, mother and daughter, husband and wife. At our Texas teen camp this past year, the young ladies greatly enjoyed learning how to preserve food. You could plant a family garden, learn to play a musical instrument, or learn a foreign language with the goal of using it while visiting a foreign country during the Feast.

Let Us Have Courage

The genie is out of the bottle and cannot be put back, short of Christ's return and the total reordering of the course of this world. However, we each have choices to make. Former U.S. President Ronald Reagan summed up how we are to face many of the challenges in life, saying that there are no easy answers, but there are simple answers, and we must have the courage to do what we know is morally right. Yes, with God's guidance, let us have that courage! ^(L)



The Lessons of Lot

By **John Robinson**

I imagine that you woke up tomorrow and somehow knew that the judgment of God was very, very near—that *everything* was different, and things were never going to be the same again. What kind of questions would you be asking yourself? How would you feel about how you had spent your time leading up to that moment? How would you feel about everything you had (or had not) accomplished over the course of your life?

The Bible records many examples of time suddenly running out. God reminds us repeatedly that He will intervene at certain times in world affairs—most powerfully at the end of the age. And no matter how aware we are of that coming intervention, it will still feel very sudden to us when we finally see God once again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked and judge those whose hearts remain too attached to the world.

Christ revealed that there will be some semblance of “normal” right up until *nothing* is normal anymore, and He drew parallels between the end of this age and two cataclysmic events of ages past:

And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot’s wife (Luke 17:26–32).

God makes a distinction between those who serve Him and those who don’t. There’s no gray area—you’re either on

one side or the other when God delivers His judgment. We see this made clear in Malachi 3:16–18:

Then those who respected the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD took notice. A scroll was prepared before him in which were recorded the names of those who respected the LORD and honored his name. “They will belong to me,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, “in the day when I prepare my own special property. I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you will see that I make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not” (Malachi 3:16–18, *New English Translation*).

Let’s look at the examples of Abraham and Lot, and let’s note differences between their choices. The Bible makes it quite clear that although Abraham and Lot were both considered righteous (Genesis 15:6; 2 Peter 2:7–8), they made very different decisions—and those decisions brought very different results.

The First Step Toward Sodom

After God told Abram, “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1), he and his family, including his nephew Lot, “came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land” (Genesis 12:1–6). We see that they did not move into an empty land—there were already people there, and those people had very different ways and customs.

Abram and Lot both greatly prospered in this land—in terms of wealth and power, they may have been comparable to any of the kings in the area. They both had a great abundance of “flocks and herds and tents. Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock. The Canaanites

and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land” (Genesis 13:5–7). Part of the reason why there wasn’t enough room for both Abram’s herds and Lot’s was that the Canaanites and Perizzites were already living there.

This meant Abram and Lot needed to part ways, so a choice had to be made: Who would go where? Abram showed his character by saying, “Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left” (Genesis 13:8–9).

With the choice left to him, Lot based his decision entirely on what he could see with his eyes—the most prosperous and fertile land he could find—and he “chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD” (Genesis 13:11–13).

A Lesson Unlearned

Sodom, Gomorrah, and their allies were in subjugation to four other kings, as they had been for several years. They decided it was time to rebel—but their rebellion was put down, and when they were defeated, their overlords “took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way” (Genesis 14:1–11).

But notice that Lot, too, got swept up in all this. “They also took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed” (v. 12). Hearing about this, Abram proved his loyalty yet again: “He armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them.... So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people” (vv. 14–16).

As you might imagine, the king of Sodom and his allies became excited about this turn of events. In fact, “the king of Sodom said to Abram, ‘Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself’” (v. 21). Now, Abram had his own decision to make. His only real goal had been to rescue Lot, and that mission was accomplished. He’d brought back all the goods for Sodom and Gomorrah to reclaim, and they were so grateful that they wanted him to take something. But Abram was convicted that this was a bad idea—as we have already seen, these were exceedingly wicked people. Abram knew this, and he did not want to take anything that would allow them to hold it over him: *Hey, we gave you all that stuff—maybe you could do us a favor in return.*

Most of us would not have judged Abram harshly if he had taken something for his trouble, but he completely separated himself from Sodom and Gomorrah in every way he could. “Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, ... that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’—except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me’” (vv. 22–24).

Abram sought to have nothing to do with the lives those people lived, nor to establish any bond with or sense of allegiance to them. There is a clear distinction between Abram’s discernment and Lot’s lack thereof. Living close to Sodom had almost cost Lot everything, and his rescue had come through someone who was *not* close to Sodom—but Lot didn’t take the hint. Instead, he just crept closer and closer to Sodom, taking his family with him, to the point where he was eventually living within the very gates of the city.

When the World Becomes Home

“Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. And he said, ‘Here now, my lords, please turn in to your servant’s house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way’” (Genesis 19:1–2). We see that Lot still had a relationship with God, at least enough to recognize God’s messengers. However, we should also note that Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom, meaning that he was one of its elders or judges. So, not only did Lot move in—he became involved in Sodom’s politics. His life became intertwined with what was going on in that city.

When “he insisted strongly,” the angels “entered his house. Then he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot and said to him, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we may know them carnally’” (vv. 3–5).

Clearly, rape and homosexuality were among the sins for which God was about to condemn this city. Some people—even many who call themselves Christian—say that the Bible doesn’t really condemn homosexuality, but numerous scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments prove that it does (e.g., Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:26–28; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10). There can be no compromise on this point. It can be all too easy, especially for those who have grown up in this age of homosexuality’s widespread acceptance, to be sympathetic to it. To be sure, we must love the sinner, but sympathy toward the sin can make us part of the problem (Romans 1:28–32).

As the account continues, we see how deeply Lot had let himself become a part of the city—he even called the men of Sodom his brothers, begging, “Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly!” Their response? “This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them” (Genesis 19:6–9). Lot was shown that the system into which he had entrenched himself was willing to turn on him in an instant.

Then we see just how addicted to sin the people of Sodom truly were: “They pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near to break down the door. But the men reached out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary trying to find the door” (vv. 9–11). Their corruption ran so deep that even supernatural blindness wasn’t enough to deter them from the abominable path they were on.

Why Would We Linger?

When sin becomes this deeply ingrained in a society, God intervenes—and whatever once passed for normal, day-to-day activity is suddenly and irreversibly cut short. “Then the men said to Lot, ‘Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whomever you have in the city—take them out of this place! For we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the LORD’” (vv. 12–13).

But despite this urgent warning, Lot lacked urgency. “When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, ‘Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the

It’s safe to say that too much of Lot’s heart was in Sodom, whatever his reasons. Maybe his heart was where his children and grandchildren were. Maybe his heart was where his position and livelihood were, or where his friends were, or even just where his familiar, comfortable life was. **Where are our hearts?**

city” (v. 15). Yet, still, “he lingered,” and ultimately “the men took hold of his hand, his wife’s hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him. And they brought him out and set him outside the city” (v. 16). When the time came, Lot practically had to be dragged out of Sodom. Why?

Scripture doesn’t tell us exactly why Lot hesitated, which gives us room to imagine what might cause *us* to hesitate. Having to leave family members behind, knowing the ca-

tastrophe they would face, would be very difficult for most of us. We read that, the day before Sodom’s destruction, Lot “went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, ‘Get up, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city!’ But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking” (v. 14).

The Hebrew is somewhat ambiguous as to whether these “sons-in-law” were married to additional daughters of Lot or betrothed to the daughters we have already met in the account. There’s no clear indication of just how large Lot’s family was, but it’s reasonable to think that, when Abraham was negotiating with God, he may have ended at a number of righteous people close to the number of Lot’s family members. So, it’s possible that Lot and his wife left children—perhaps even grandchildren—behind as they fled.

It’s safe to say that too much of Lot’s heart was in Sodom, whatever his reasons. Maybe his heart was where his children and grandchildren were. Maybe his heart was where his position and livelihood were, or where his friends were, or even just where his familiar, comfortable life was. Where are our hearts? Do we have the faith in God to, if and when it is necessary, leave behind family, friends, positions, stability, and comfort?

Looking with Longing

The angels told Lot, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed” (v. 17).

But rather than trust in their directions, Lot decided that, if he couldn’t have Sodom, he would beg for the closest thing he could get: “Then Lot said to them, ‘Please, no, my lords!...

I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die. See now, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one; please let me escape there (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live’” (vv. 18–20).

God then demonstrated His amazing patience and mercy, as His angel said to Lot, “See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken.

Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there” (vv. 21–22).

As always, God was true to His word—He waited until “Lot entered Zoar” before He “rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah.... But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt” (vv. 23–26). This can be a bit puzzling to English-language readers, as it can seem that Lot’s wife was punished just for glancing at what God was doing. But the Hebrew reveals that she wasn’t just peeking at a mi-

raculous intervention. The *New English Translation* renders verse 26 this way: “But Lot’s wife looked back longingly and was turned into a pillar of salt.” It adds in a footnote, “The Hebrew verb means ‘to look intently; to gaze.’”

Her attitude was that of someone regretting the loss of her old world—who would have preserved it if she could. Yet nothing about Sodom and Gomorrah was worth preserving, which is why God destroyed them utterly. Lot and his family had become far too entangled in the worldly system upon which Sodom was built, which made God’s intervention far more traumatic for Lot’s wife than it should have been. How entangled in this world’s system are we?

Living Like Abraham

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah went very differently for Abraham than it did for Lot: “Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace” (Genesis 19:27–28).

Both Abraham and Lot were considered righteous. But while Lot’s decisions brought him close to the world and ultimately cost him almost everything—including a pure relationship with his own daughters, as we read in the rest of the chapter—Abraham lived a far more peaceful and prosperous life because he chose to stay “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

We all hope to be counted worthy to escape the Great Tribulation and be sheltered in the Place of Safety. But, when we leave this world behind, will our decisions up to that point give us the peace of Abraham, or will they give us the trauma of Lot?

What should we be doing—as a Church and individually—to be counted among those who are like Abraham? Christ explained the attitude we should have:

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. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. 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 24:45–51).

Those who will be made rulers will have been faithfully doing the job Christ assigned to them in this life—not falling into the complacency of those who come to feel that this world is just going to go on forever. Christ made clear that we are to take care of our brothers and sisters in His Church and to do the Work of preaching the Gospel He taught, making disciples of the nations. If that is our focus, we will not have time for the pursuits that distracted Lot—falling in with the wealthy, powerful, and influential of this world (1 John 2:16).

The Apostle Peter reminds us that “scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation’” (2 Peter 3:3–4). There are people who, with their words or with their actions, say, *Christ is never going to return. This world is never going to change. It’s always going to be like this.* What are we saying in how we live our lives?

Deep down, if we enjoy comfortable lives—as many of us do—we don’t really want those lives to be disrupted. It can be tempting, then, to look at the society around us and consider it “not *that* bad,” as it’s easy for us to get used to it. But we must fight against such thinking, because judgment *is* coming, and God will once again draw a distinction between the righteous and the wicked. He will change the entire world very suddenly—and when He does, the degree to which our lives are intertwined with the world will determine how difficult that change will be for us. Lot learned this the hard way.

One day, the world will turn upside down, and things we have long taken for granted will not be granted anymore. And although we know that day is coming, it will still take many by surprise. But because of God’s faithfulness to His people, our safety will not be determined by whether we have enough survivalist training, enough food stockpiled, or a secret bunker underground somewhere. The real danger we face will be whether we have let ourselves become a little too immersed in this world—whether we have been pulled away from our mission and purpose.

Our job in this lifetime is to be living God’s way and, with the resources we have, contributing to what He is doing on the earth—spreading the Gospel. We don’t want to ever neglect that Work, “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).

Let’s remember the lessons of Lot and his family, and let’s heed God’s warning: “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4). (LN)



The Pope's Calendar

By **J. Charles Ogwyn**

The year was 1576, and Pope Gregory XIII was holding a document in his hands that promised to solve a 1,620-year-old problem. The dilemma was essentially over how to repair the Julian calendar—itsself an attempt to “solve” an issue with an older system—so it would stay in sync with the seasons.

When the Julian calendar was introduced in 45 BC, it replaced the previous Roman (or Republican) calendar that was based on both the sun and the moon. The Julian calendar simplified things considerably by completely abandoning the lunar cycles of that previous Roman system.

The result was a calendar that looked a lot like the calendar of today—just with different rules for leap years. Those rules, which Julius Caesar introduced with his calendar reform, were based on his inaccurate understanding that a solar year is exactly 365.25 days long. Therefore, a calendar that was 365 days long was used for three years, and every fourth year, without exception, a leap day was added to February.

For its first several centuries, the problem with the Julian calendar wasn't apparent, but by the 1500s the calendar was ten days out of sync. For those who celebrated Easter, this meant that on the calendar their holiday was occurring further and further away from the spring equinox. Unless the Pope took action, Easter would eventually be celebrated in the summer instead of the spring. Since Easter was inextricably tied to spring and its agricultural rebirth, this was an enormous crisis that precipitated the institution of the Gregorian calendar.

In 1576, the framework for what came to be called the Gregorian calendar (though primarily developed by Aloysius Lilius) was ready for papal evaluation. Pope Gregory XIII appointed a Papal Calendar Reform Commission to analyze it, and six years later the calendar now used in most countries around the world was introduced by way of the papal bull *Inter gravissimas*. Initially adopted by the Roman Catholic countries of Europe and their colonies around the world, its usage and reach have continued to spread—most recently in 2016 to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

God's Timetable

Genesis 1 introduces us to different aspects of the creation, including the concept of time. “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day” (vv. 3–5). The first aspect of the creation that we are introduced to is the most basic unit of the calendar. Here we learn that the counting of this daily cycle begins at sundown. The day is the foundation for marking time.

On day four of the recreation week, we are introduced to annual cycles of time.

Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day (vv. 14–19).

On the seventh day of the creation week, we are introduced not only to the Sabbath, but also to the God-ordained weekly cycle of seven days. That a week is seven days in length was established at the beginning of creation. So, from Genesis 1–2 we get the foundational framework for marking time—days, weeks, seasons, and years.

Nothing God does is insignificant. Every aspect of His creation has a purpose, and time is no different. Not only does Genesis reveal where we came from—it is also where He begins to reveal the purpose of His creation and the span of time He has appointed for it. None of this was arbitrary. God didn't rest on the seventh day because He was tired—He rested to create the Sabbath, which He created to point mankind to

Him and to His plan (Mark 2:27; Hebrews 4:9; 2 Peter 3:8). To ensure that the message inherent in the Sabbath wasn't forgotten, God gave instructions on how this sacred day was to be observed (Exodus 20:8–11).

The foundation for what we understand about God's plan and His purpose for mankind is laid in the opening pages of Scripture. Other passages fill in additional details and build upon the lessons contained in the "history of the heavens and the earth when they were created" (Genesis 2:4).

Rebellion and Divergence

In Genesis 3, we're told about mankind's first sin. Satan deceived Eve, and the result was that Adam and Eve rebelled against God. Mankind has followed in their footsteps ever since, and our acts of rebellion drive a wedge between us and God. But the rest of Scripture reveals that this wedge will not be permanent—that God has a plan to reconcile mankind to Himself. The weekly Sabbath reminds us of this.

Instead of looking to God as the source of guidance and instruction in life, mankind has taken that prerogative for itself, and the fruit of that approach is abundantly clear. Under the sway of "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2), the very foundation upon which society is built was laid in opposition to God. Every attempt has been made to obscure God and His plan from view—and to replace it with anything and everything else.

It is no surprise, then, that when we look at how time is marked we see a divergence between the pattern God laid out in Genesis and the pattern used in society around us. We see this in the most basic unit of measurement on the calendar—the day. Instead of recognizing that days begin at sunset, the world counts them as if they begin in the dead of night. This "contribution" to the common calendar came courtesy of the ancient Romans and was popularized by Julius Caesar when he established the Julian calendar. Prior to that, sunrise was a popular starting point for counting the day in Egypt and other cultures, particularly where forms of sun worship were practiced.

The basis for counting seasons and years as laid out in Genesis involved the use of both the sun and the moon. The Hebrew calendar follows this pattern, so it is known as a lunisolar calendar. Because it tracks time in conjunction with the phases of the moon for months and anchors itself to the solar year mathematically, the annual Holy Days have always fallen during their corresponding agricultural seasons. By contrast, the Julian/Gregorian calendar is a solar calendar—it relies exclusively on the earth's revolution around the sun to maintain alignment with the agricultural seasons. So, whereas the months on the Hebrew calendar are synchronized with the phases of the moon, there is a disconnect between the moon and the months on the Gregorian calendar.

God told Moses that the month of Abib "shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Exodus 12:2). God ordained that the year would begin in the spring—in harmony with the agricultural seasons. By contrast, the Julian and Gregorian calendars begin the year in the dead of winter.

The Pope's Calendar and Us

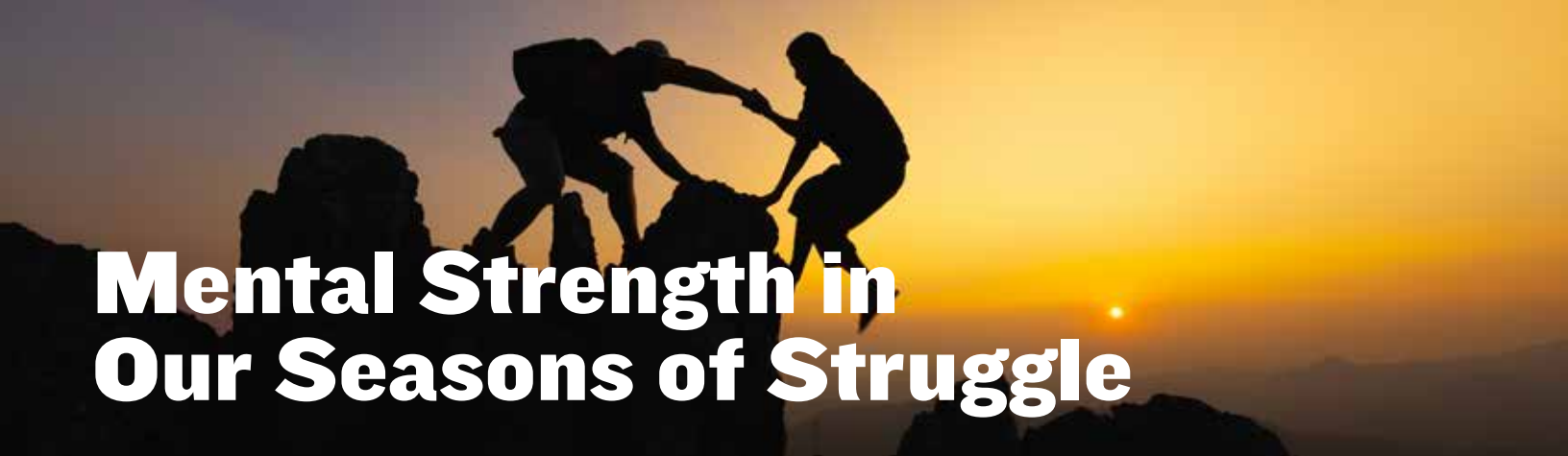
Ancient Rome shaped the modern world in many ways, such as government and administration, law, engineering, cultural integration, and language—and one of the most significant Roman influences was the Julian calendar. This revised Roman system standardized the way time was tracked across the Western world for more than 1,600 years and lives on even today (with a tweak in the leap-year rules) in the Gregorian calendar. Interestingly, although the Gregorian calendar is named after Pope Gregory XIII, his calendar was just a modification of what an earlier Roman Pontiff, Julius Caesar—who also held the title Pontifex Maximus—originally created.

So, what does the use of the Pope's calendar mean for followers of Christ today? Looking forward to the fall of "Babylon the great" (Revelation 18:2) and the return of Jesus Christ, we take to heart the admonition we read in Revelation 18:4: "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues." We are called to be spiritually separate from this world and its many pagan systems.

Does this mean that we are never to use the Roman calendar? Not at all. Calendars simply mark time, letting us synchronize our schedules and keep track of events and milestones. Jesus Christ lived in a society governed by two different calendars, and so do we—the Hebrew calendar was relied on for the Sabbath and the Holy Days, while the Julian calendar governed civil matters such as taxes and administrative records.

However, our use of this calendar does not mean that we should celebrate it. By way of example, Americans celebrated 250 years of independence on July 4, 2026, but this milestone was not universally celebrated around the world; rather, it was celebrated by those who celebrate what the United States of America is and represents. Each country has its own significant milestones that are celebrated by those who are part of those cultures.

In the same way, January 1 represents a milestone—the establishment of the Roman system to govern time. Those who get caught up in that day's festivities are celebrating what the Roman system is and represents—a world held captive by the prince of the power of the air. Let us all give thanks to God that we have a weekly reminder of a better world to come. (LN)



Mental Strength in Our Seasons of Struggle

By **Everett McNair**

Life is hard. We all go through seasons of struggle, enduring difficult times that God allows us to experience. Scripture says to “count it all joy when you fall into various trials”—not “if,” but “when” (James 1:2).

In fact, we are not to simply experience difficulties—God encourages us to find joy in them, because they begin a chain reaction that can bring us to spiritual maturity: “tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3–4). We are guaranteed to have discomfort in our lives, but God also gives us a *purpose* for pain, “knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:3–4).

With these benefits, it is no wonder that the Apostle Paul tells us to “glory in tribulations” (Romans 5:3). We all need perseverance as we struggle, we all need strength to form God’s very character in us, and we all need to develop rock-solid hope—and suffering is an essential tool that God uses to build these qualities in our lives.

But, while we know we should surrender our pain to God as we endure our seasons of struggle, we are often tempted to give our pain to Satan instead. The Devil controls the culture and industries of this world (Ephesians 2:2), and those industries are incentivized to extend our bad days into bad months, or even bad years.

In her recent book *GIRLS®: Generation Z and the Commodification of Everything*, Freya India sums up today’s toxic landscape: “a beauty industry that thrives on our self-loathing; a wellness industry that relies on our stress and anxiety; a pharmaceutical industry that needs our distress and diagnoses; a dating industry that depends on our dissatisfaction and continuous swiping; a porn industry that profits from our objectification; a consumer culture that cashes in on our search for identity and belonging. Our despair and disempowerment,” she notes, “are worth billions” (pp. 11–12, 2026).

These industries have the most to gain from us if we run to them to escape our pain, viewing it as something to be avoided at all costs, lest we be shattered like teacups. It is eas-

ier for them to capture, hold, and profit from our attention if we are stagnant in our trials—in fact, the worse our suffering becomes, the more profitable we are to them. If we are not careful, we can allow Satan’s systems to use our pain, taking us down a path of decreasing mental strength and increasing mental anguish.

But, with God’s help, we do not have to be like teacups. As we allow Him to work with us, we react to suffering more and more like muscle—growing stronger when broken down. When we face a time of struggle, we have a choice: let Satan and his world use our pain, or surrender our pain to God for our growth. One path leads to weakening and greater pain, the other to strength and, ultimately, deliverance.

How can you ensure that God will use your seasons of struggle for your growth? Here are a few practical tips.

Prioritize Your Time with God

When God told Joshua to lead the children of Israel after Moses’ death (Joshua 1:1–2), He gave him no easy task—imagine being asked to replace someone who had repeatedly feared for his life! Thankfully, Joshua didn’t have an opportunity to go down a social media rabbit hole and watch a video called “5 Reasons Your Trauma from Egypt Will Make You a Bad Leader of Israel.” Instead, Joshua heard from God, “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed” (Joshua 1:9).

The word translated “dismayed” here can also mean “shattered” or “broken down with fear.” Sometimes we feel that way—that we have been shattered and broken, that we have been completely defeated by life and there is no hope. God told Joshua to defy this hopeless feeling, reminding him that “the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (v. 9). God is with you, too, as you face the struggles of your life. He empowers you to be strong, not shattered.

The same God who encouraged Joshua that day also told His disciples to “be of good cheer” when facing tribulations—because He overcame the world, and through God’s Spirit we have access to the same power to overcome (John 16:33; Ephesians 3:16). Satan wants us to forget that God is with us, because he knows that, if we do, we will inevitably allow ourselves to become his prey.

And unless we are consistently paying attention to God, it is all too easy to forget that He is with us. What kind of attention do you give to God each day? A quick glance at a Bible app before you go back to scrolling or gaming? Or do you prioritize your time with Him—putting it first, far above this world’s diversions?

Some find that early mornings make the best time for focused Bible study, longer prayer, and meditation. Others find midday or evening more suitable, and some use more than one part of the day. We all operate on different schedules and function according to specific biological needs, but we can all set aside specific, planned time each day to give God our focused attention. In a world constantly vying for our attention, we must guard the time we spend with Him. If we do, and if we never forget that He is on our side, we will be unstoppable in our quest to build mental strength (Romans 8:31).

Orient Your Life to Help Others

When we are hurting, we are naturally inclined to focus inwardly—yet studies show that “too much self-focused attention is linked with more negative thinking and a higher risk of anxiety and depression” (“Lending a Helping Hand: Doing Good Deeds is Good Medicine for Mood and Memory,” *Harvard Health Publishing*, October 1, 2023).

God encourages outreach and gives rewards for it: “If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail” (Isaiah 58:10–11).

When we are in the midst of suffering, we ache to our very core, longing for our souls to be satisfied and our bones to be strengthened. If you turn your lens outward, to those needing help, you can rely on God’s promise to refresh you—and even your worst days of darkness can be filled with His light.

As we shift our focus toward others, we by necessity shift it *away* from self, resisting the world’s mentality of self-promotion. As social media grew through the 2010s, it became commonplace for people to build and promote their public images with the fervor of a professional marketing team. Now, vacation spots are often chosen for the “content” to be captured. Visits to landmarks often revolve around the best lighting. Even moments as intimate as marriage proposals are frequently repeated several times to ensure the camera angle is “correct.”

The Pharisees had much in common with this aspect of modern society. Christ corrected them intensely, noting that “all their works they do to be seen by men” (Matthew 23:5). They were obsessed with being admired—focused on their

outward appearance rather than on improving themselves inwardly.

What about us? Do we do our deeds to be seen by others? It can be difficult to identify our true motivations for posting and sharing, so we must remember what Christ told the Pharisees: “whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12). As you strive to orient yourself toward others, be willing to savor your time with them without the distraction of strangers’ opinions. Many moments are better left uncaptured, treasured only in the memories of those who were there. More importantly, refrain from marketing yourself and focus instead on inward growth.

Gain Strength Together as a Family

God gave mankind the family unit as the fundamental building block of society, and a godly family dynamic is a bulwark against the onslaught of Satan’s culture. God expects parents to pass His way of life on to future generations (Deuteronomy 6:6–7). This includes teaching children how to navigate life’s trials.

It’s easy to allow TV, social media, video games, and the busyness of life to leave us with no time to “walk by the way” with one another. Social media promised to connect us, but left out the risks of losing in-person connection with our closest family and friends. A 2024 study suggested that parents who spent an average of more than one hour per day with their children in “joint activities (e.g., play board games, go for a walk, talk about things)” reduced teen alcohol, smoking, gambling, and addictive social media use (I. Koning and C. Voogt, “Adolescents Spending Time with Their Parents: Does It Matter?,” *Youth*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 556–566).

This strengthening goes both ways. Seasons of struggle aren’t limited to adolescence! We should reach across generational gaps to encourage and help our parents, grandparents, children, and grandchildren through these seasons. Struggles do not have to divide your family: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). In fact, if you resolve to stand together against the temptation to stagnate when trials come, your family can grow closer than ever.

You *can* overcome whatever hardships you are facing. Whatever season of struggle you find yourself in, you *can* get through it with God’s help—and, what’s more, you will become stronger as you do so. May God use the seasons of struggle in your life to produce mental strength. May He “perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (1 Peter 5:10).

You are alive at an exciting yet challenging time in history. Will you give your pain to Satan and his world to extend your trials and prevent growth? Or will you give it to God and allow Him to develop your mental strength? (L)

The 2026 LYP Adventure Camp



By **Brent Mitchell**

From June 21–26, 28 people—16 campers and twelve staff members—traded the comforts of home for six days in New York’s Adirondack Mountains. Our home for the week was the Rollins Pond Campground, located in the St. Regis Wilderness.

Throughout the week, we experienced breathtaking scenery, ideal weather (the rain didn’t start until we began packing up), rewarding adventures, and countless reminders of God’s amazing design. From the start of camp, we emphasized the benefits of doing hard things, expanding our comfort zones, and working as a team, and this emphasis continued throughout our adventures.

The purpose of Adventure Camp goes beyond hiking mountains or paddling canoes. Our goals include:

- Coming to better appreciate God by experiencing more of His creation
- Practicing God’s way of life in a more natural environment than most of us are accustomed to
- Spending time with youth in God’s Church
- Learning new skills
- Challenging ourselves with adventure
- Getting away from technology

First things first—each day, before we launched our canoes or laced up our hiking boots, we conducted a Bible study. These studies helped center our minds on God’s way of life and gave us direction for the rest of the day. Also, before going to sleep, we gathered around the campfire to finish each day with a reflection on God’s awesome creation or what we could learn from the examples around us about living God’s way of life.

Day 1: Preparing for the Journey

Our first day focused on orientation and hands-on workshops. Campers and staff alike learned and practiced essential outdoor skills that would soon be put to good use:

- The principle of “Leave No Trace,” as we sought to preserve God’s beautiful creation

- Canoeing techniques, including entering and exiting safely, paddling efficiently, and carrying canoes during portages
- Rope and knot tying for securing equipment and setting up camp
- Orienteering and using maps to navigate where technology is not available
- Fire building, learning how to select proper tinder and kindling, and understanding the three elements every fire needs to burn successfully—heat, fuel, and oxygen

Days 2 and 3: Adventures on the Water

The camp divided into two groups, each tackling a different adventure on day 2 and switching on day 3. One of the adventures was to complete a challenging 15-mile canoe loop that included six portages. After paddling across a pond, portaging is required in order to transport canoes and gear to the next pond—everything had to be unloaded and packed up, carried over sometimes narrow and difficult trails, and launched again into the next pond. Portaging quickly reinforced what we had learned about teamwork. Sometimes one person carried the canoe while others carried the gear. At other times, two campers worked together to shoulder a canoe through uneven trails while another person walked ahead to help navigate obstacles.

The second adventure combined canoeing and hiking into one challenging route. After paddling three miles, the group had to complete a grueling three-quarter-mile portage, paddle another mile, and then hike nearly two miles—with more than 1,000 feet of incline—to the summit of Long Pond Mountain. Reaching the top provided everyone with sweeping views of Rollins Pond and the surrounding St. Regis Wilderness, and the effort required to get there made the view even more rewarding. The hiking, paddling, and portaging then needed to be completed in reverse order to return to camp.

Day 4: Ampersand Mountain

On the fourth day, both groups set out for a hike up Ampersand Mountain. To abide by trail etiquette and park rules, we had to hike in two separate groups, spacing ourselves about a mile apart, but everyone experienced the same adventure. This hike

was a six-mile round trip and gained roughly 1,800 feet in elevation, ending with an almost sheer climb to the summit.

Throughout the hike, what we had learned in the days prior was put into practice. Whether through encouraging words, helping hands, or offers to carry someone else's day-pack, the teamwork we'd practiced during the week came naturally. It was a reminder that "teamwork makes the dream work," accomplishing difficult things often depends on looking beyond ourselves, and finishing together is more important than crossing the finish line first.

When we finally reached the summit at 3,352 feet above sea level, every tired step was forgotten as the cool breeze dried the sweat on our foreheads. Before us stretched a breathtaking panoramic view of forests, lakes, ponds, and mountains as far as the eye could see. Standing there, it was impossible not to marvel at the greatness of God's creation, and we also had the blessing of sharing this majestic view with the other group as we rested before heading back down the mountain together.

Campfires, Fellowship, and Departure

After long days on the trails and ponds, returning to camp was greatly appreciated. We regrouped as one camp, sharing stories of adventure as we enjoyed a delicious meal to replenish the calories we had burned throughout the day.

Each evening, campers built a campfire using the skills they had learned on the first day. Around those fires, we shared stories, laughed together, and strengthened friendships that will last beyond the week. Before our evening reflections, stickers were awarded to those who had proven themselves throughout the day in noticeable ways—perhaps by canoeing a straight line, starting that evening's fire, or encouraging another person along the adventure.

We were blessed in countless ways throughout the week. The clear skies and mild temperatures could hardly have been better for hiking and paddling, and even the pesky mosquitoes and flies—usually abundant in the Adirondacks at that time of year—were surprisingly scarce.

On June 26, after we had packed up the wet tents, we left the place we had called home for the past six days, where we had connected with God and built lasting memories. We took home more than our hard-earned T-shirts and stickers—the true reward came from drawing closer to God through our time in His creation, building friendships, and pushing the boundaries of our comfort zones. Adventure Camp isn't just about surviving a challenging week in the wilderness—ultimately, it's about expanding our capacities for service and forging bonds of friendship with those of like mind, surrounded by God's creation. (L)



Texas Teen Camp 2026

By **Jonathan McNair**

Summer camp has become a highlight of the year for many families in the Church. Like God's Holy Days, camp provides a time to gather, fellowship, and enjoy activities. And, like God's commanded assemblies, the camp experience includes education—opportunities to learn more about God's ways.

This summer, God really blessed the Texas Teen Camp with good weather! Knowing how hot it could have been, we especially appreciated the reasonably mild temperatures—especially mild for July in Texas. Even so, we still carried out two all-camp emergency drills, so we'd be prepared in the event of severe weather. A new grounds-wide public address system installed by the camp worked well, along with new handheld radios for our supervisors and counselors. Thunderstorms did roll through on a couple of occasions, though, and we did lose electrical power for seven or eight hours one evening. Thankfully, power was restored before we began our next day of activities.

It was a healthy camp overall. Our camp nurse cared for several campers and staff with bumps, bug bites, and bruises, as was expected, but there were no serious injuries. It does seem typical, though, that a handful of our staff and campers come down with colds or the flu every year—and this year was no exception.

On another health-related note, campers had the opportunity to learn basic first aid in one of our classes, which was taught by a staff member who coordinates safety training for a large company. Most campers completed the Health & Safety Institute program and qualified for a certificate.

A special activity we initiated this year involved the lost art of letter writing! Before camp, we encouraged parents to take the time to write a letter to their campers. We had created a special LYC postcard, and we encouraged campers to use it to take a few minutes to write home on the Sabbath. Of course, we heard the occasional *Why do that when I can just text?* This gave counselors a “teachable moment” to talk about the value of thinking about words to handwrite on a physical piece of paper to send to a loved one far away. It was definitely a “retro” moment for many. But what was particu-

larly encouraging was that we received more than 50 letters addressed to campers from their parents, which they were thrilled to read. There is nothing like a piece of paper, with words lovingly recorded, to hold in our hands and savor.

Each camper was sent home with a photo booklet containing dozens of pictures documenting LYC 2026. For more photos, we pointed them toward our online photo album with more than 1,800 photos of camp. Our hope is that this will fulfill parents', campers', and staff members' desire for access to pictures of camp. In our social media-driven world, the ease of sharing photos of everyone and everything for the world to see can include awkward photos, unflattering photos, photos that include someone in the background who would rather not be in the picture, and more. Many parents recognize the increasing dangers of posting pictures of their children online, including identity theft, A.I.-generated fakes, and cyberbullying. We certainly do not want to contribute to this, so we've created a private online photo album with a password-protected login.

Sadly, this still leaves us with the reality that on Facebook, Instagram, or other social media platforms, individuals can carelessly post pictures without exercising good wisdom and discernment. We hope all our members will join us in exercising care and consideration regarding pictures they post online.

Camp is a great time to break away from the “vicarious” living that dominates the lives of so many, especially our younger people. It is real fun, with real friends, learning real godly principles for life! (LN)







TITUS 2:3-5

Woman to Woman

The Worry List

By **Amber Leonard**

We each have a set of them—worries or “what-ifs” that run through our minds, keeping us awake at night or waking us in the morning with feelings of dread. On this list may be burdens like “Will I make ends meet this month? Is my job too stressful? Are my husband and children healthy, physically and mentally? Am I? Am I doing enough to teach my kids everything they should know in life? Am I meeting all the requirements I should be?” Every woman’s list is different.

Then there are burdens that are even heavier to bear. Situations arise that may shake us to our core. Some women may have lost loved ones. Some may be dealing with extreme health trials or illnesses of family members.

Every woman has a carousel of items that concern her. If one more scoop of mishap were to be piled onto our already heavy plate, would we drop it altogether? What happens when things are out of our control? We may be able to relate to these words: “For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning” (Psalm 73:14). So, how do we as women in God’s Church respond to these situations?

What Do We Do with Our List?

Thankfully, in *any* situation where things begin to spin out of control and we feel overwhelmed by stress, there is always a *perfect* solution: “Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved” (Psalm 55:22).

In other words, we are to throw our burden of worry away in prayer—mentally take aim at God’s feet, toss it as far away from us as we can, and leave it there. We do not just “cast” it out there on a fishing line, then reel it back in when we’re tempted to worry about it later. We must be patient and have the faith to leave it with our Father in heaven. In doing so, we ladies can each be a friend of God (James 2:23).

David provided an example for us: “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice. He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that was against me, for there were many against me” (Psalm 55:17-18). Early in the morning, when your worried mind

is already racing a million miles a minute, you can slide out from under the covers onto your knees to unload all your worries and “what-ifs” for the day.

Our eternal Father has promised that He will hear you and help you: “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15). Rather than worrying, tell the Father your plans for the day and how you will need Him to help you through each situation.

Available All Day Long

Morning is not the only time women of God can cast their cares on Him. You can have a “heart-to-heart” with Him about your anxieties throughout the day. You will not always have time to take a break from your daily tasks, but conversations with God do not always need to happen on your knees. Your Father is right there beside you, experiencing the day with you, and you can talk to Him as a loving Friend who has only our best interests at heart, because that’s who He is. You can ask His advice and direction on any decision you must make, large or small.

You can talk to Him when you are washing the dishes, doing the laundry, or mowing the lawn. Before you go grocery shopping, you can ask Him to bless your trip and help you to be able to afford your needs and even some of the desires of your heart. When I pray for this, I often find good deals on items marked down at the store, or buy-one-get-one-free sales on things we use regularly, or coupons in the store app for free items that we need. Your Father wants to give you good things: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him” (Matthew 7:11).

Praying is good for *any* situation. If you, your husband, or your children have an important event coming up, you can pray for favor with the people you must deal with. If there are stubborn, seemingly immovable people in your life, God can soften their hearts toward you. If God could change the heart of Pharaoh and initiate the Exodus, He can certainly help you with your “unbudgeable” issue.

When facing a serious health trial, don't save God's healing for your "last-ditch" effort. Ask for an anointing as your first line of defense, trusting in His promise: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14–15). We don't need to know what the problem is. God knows when we are sick and why. He wants us to come to Him, and He wants to help us through each trial.

God Is on Our Side

What if you face a chronic illness that doesn't have an easy fix or maybe has no fix at all? What if someone you love is dying or has died? God may seem to be too far away to hear your prayers, but He is still right there with you, on your side. Psalm 34:18 tells us, "The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit." The *New Living Translation* puts it this way: "The LORD is close to the broken-hearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed."

God wants good lives for His children, and blessings come from living His way. But we sometimes face trials to test our resolve and bring about the character God wants in us, so we can better receive His blessings. Right after promising prosperity and health, He cautions us, "My son [or daughter], do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:11–12). Perhaps we

What if someone you love is dying or has died? God may seem to be too far away to hear your prayers, but **He is still right there with you, on your side.**

are so stubborn that He can only teach us the lesson we need by letting us face a difficult experience. Or, when you face a severe trial, it could mean that He knows you are a strong enough woman to handle the increased level of pressure necessary to build up your spiritual maturity.

Are We on God's Side?

Sometimes it seems we are suffering without end, and we think our Father is angry with us for something we have done or that He has abandoned us. But He promises never to forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). His promises are firm and wholly believable, but sometimes they are contingent upon our obedience to Him and His way of life. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). When we are called according to His purpose, He must see by

our conduct that we are women of God who will stay on *His* side, even when things get tough.

And, as scary as it may seem, we must realize that God may sometimes give us adversity as a gift. In Job 2:10, during an extended period of severe trials, Job corrected his wife after she told him to curse God and die: "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?"

We must trust that God will deliver us and bless us in His time, whether it be in this life or in His Kingdom. Numbers 23:19 reminds us, "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" If we live according to His way and rely on His promises, He will never let us down.

Even When We're Not Looking

This spring, my children enjoyed playing outside in the warmer weather every day for a week, building a makeshift fort out of camping chairs and whatever they could find in the backyard. The wind blew strongly all week long, and the trees swayed. The next Sunday, we debated staying home from a Church picnic because my husband and I were very tired, but, in the end, we decided to go and be with the brethren.

When we got home from the picnic that evening, we looked outside and saw that a large tree had fallen across the backyard right where our children had been playing all week long. Watching our outdoor camera feed, we could see the tree crack and fall in just a few seconds. If we had stayed home that day, our children could very well have been out there playing when it fell.

In that moment, I felt a profound awe of God. How many times has He protected us even when we didn't realize it? Ask God to show you that He is there. Ask Him for encouragement. Christ exhorted His disciples, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

God made women strong enough to deal with multiple tasks at once so everyone we love can be cared for emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Sometimes we are our family's most important support because of our abilities to solve problems. This ensures that we will likely always have a long list of worries and "what-ifs."

But when the plate feels too heavy, our Father wants us to know that He is our ultimate Support and our closest personal Friend. We can put our burdens in His lap. We can come to Him for every little or big issue. Our circumstances may change for better or for worse, but His promises are firm and unchangeable. We have His assurance that He will readily take on our worry list if we leave it with Him. (LN)

Ordinations

Mrs. Gladys Bégarin was ordained a deaconess on April 13, 2025, by Pastor Wilner Pierre and Elder Etienne Duval. Mrs. Bégarin serves the congregation in Guadeloupe.

Mr. Timothy Ervin was ordained a deacon on July 25 by Pastor Daniel Friz and Elder Charles Ogwyn. Mr. Ervin serves in the Shreveport, Louisiana, congregation.

Mr. Jonathan Fike was ordained an elder on the 2025 Feast of Trumpets by Pastor Ron Poole and elders Steve Climer and Mike DeSimone. Mr. Fike serves in the Gaffney, South Carolina, congregation. *Editor's Note: The March-April 2026 issue incorrectly reported that Mr. Fike was ordained as a deacon. We apologize for this error.*

On February 7, **Mr. and Mrs. Gary and Sharon Hartley** were ordained deacon and deaconess by Pastor Daniel Friz and Elder H.L. Brown. Mr. and Mrs. Hartley serve in the Monroe, Louisiana, congregation.

Mr. Darrel Hoppes was ordained a deacon on February 28 by Pastor Bill Long. Mr. Hoppes serves in the Flint, Michigan, congregation.

Mr. Ryan Patterson was ordained a deacon on May 9 by Pastor Bill Long. Mr. Patterson serves in the Traverse City, Michigan, congregation.

Mr. Chris Sookdeo was ordained an elder on June 20 by Pastor Rick Stafford and elders Damian Weekes and David Grant. Mr. Sookdeo serves the brethren in the San Fernando, Trinidad, congregation.

Mr. Tim Speers was ordained a deacon on August 8 by Evangelist Stuart Wachowicz. Mr. Speers serves in the Brandon, Manitoba, congregation in Canada.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Omar and Jodi Fraser, of the Kettering congregation in England, are pleased to announce the safe birth of their son **Micah Jason Fraser** on May 27. Congratulations to the couple, big sister Tiana, and the whole family!

Mr. and Mrs. Roelof and Chrystal Lantink, of the Utrecht congregation in the Netherlands, are delighted to announce the birth of their first child, **Sofia Marielle Lantink**. She was born on November 17, 2025, weighing 3.5 kilograms.

Mr. and Mrs. Josh and Priscila Lyons are delighted to announce the birth of their daughter, **Adeline Juliette Lyons**. She was born on June 10, 2026, weighing seven pounds and 15 ounces and measuring 20.5 inches long. Her big brother, Daniel, has been very loving with his little sister. The Lyons family serves congregations in the Wisconsin and Illinois area.

Mr. and Mrs. Devon and Tara Salmond are proud to announce the birth of their first child, **Jameson Dwayne Salmond**, on June 17, weighing six pounds, 15 ounces, and measuring 20 inches. The Calgary congregation in Alberta, Canada, is pleased to welcome little Jameson.

In Loving Memory

Ms. Jackie Fay Allen, 64, died on January 22, 2025, after a long battle with major health issues. Ms. Allen was a very accomplished woman, and her life reflected determination, generosity, and kindness. She was a member of the Ocean Springs, Mississippi, congregation.

Mr. Roy Anthony, 87, finished his race on March 1 after suffering from multiple health issues. Baptized in 1960, he was a longtime member of God's Church. He lived an eventful life, even prospecting for gold with his brother David, who predeceased him. He was always ready and happy to discuss God's word with his brethren. He is survived by three children and two sisters. Mr. Anthony attended the Tacoma, Washington, and Phoenix, Arizona, congregations.

Mr. Dale Earl Bailey, 88, died peacefully on July 27, surrounded by his loving family. He and his wife were married for 67 years and were baptized together in 1968. Mr. Bailey worked at Ambassador College in Pasadena, California, for many years, and then at the Big Sandy, Texas, campus until the college closed. He was ordained an elder in 2016. Besides his wife, Yolanda, Mr. Bailey is survived by daughter Debbie Smith and son Brent Bailey (Colleen), as well as three grandchildren and one great-granddaughter. Mr. and Mrs. Bailey's home was always open to the brethren. Mr. Bailey served the Church faithfully for a lifetime and will be missed by all. Pastor Gary Stein conducted his memorial service.

Mr. Donald Cody, 75, died on June 15 after a short illness. Mr. Cody enjoyed a long and successful career as a machinist and worked from coast to coast and throughout the Caribbean. He was baptized into the Body of Christ on June 2, 2025, and will be missed by many, including his friends in the Baton Rouge, Louisiana, congregation.

Mr. Lyle R. Druckenmiller, 91, died on June 7 with his loving family by his side. Baptized in 1967, he long served as a deacon until declining health prevented him from attending services in his later years. In 1956, he married Joan M. McCollum, who predeceased him in 1982. Mr. Druckenmiller worked hard from his youth at various jobs and later became a self-employed contractor. Throughout the years, he helped friends and neighbors with projects. He is survived by a son, a daughter, and extended family. A kind man, his family remembers his deep love for his grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren. He will be greatly missed by many, including the brethren in the Northwest Ohio area.

Mrs. Connie Evans, 88, died peacefully in her sleep in the early morning of May 3. She was preceded in death by her husband Ed Evans in 2024. Both were Church members dating back to the days of Mr. Armstrong and had a shared zeal for the truth of God. Mrs. Evans was a part of the Tucson, Arizona, congregation, though she was a shut-in at the end of her life.

Mr. Steve Hazelby, 70, a longtime Church member, died on February 13. He was baptized in 1996 and attended the Hook congregation in England. He will be sorely missed by all.

Mrs. Peggy Helms, 92, died on June 5. She was baptized in 1970 and displayed a steadfast zeal for God and His way of life. Despite various health issues, she attended services until shortly before her death. Mrs. Helms had a kind heart. Family was very important to her. She had her own business making custom curtains and related items and was known for the quality of her work. Mrs. Helms was deeply loved by the Kannapolis, North Carolina, congregation and will be dearly missed. She is survived by her son Lanny and daughter Debbie.

Mrs. Cleo Mae Howie, 88, of Charleston, Illinois, died in the presence of family on June 25. She married her husband of 58 years, Donald Howie, in 1957. After listening to the *World Tomorrow* program, they began to attend the Radio Church of God in the mid-1960s, and she was baptized in 1969. She found great pleasure in gardening and flowers, and music was a lifelong passion—she loved singing, playing the accordion, and sharing her musical talents with family and friends. A devoted homemaker, she was a joy to be around and made many meaningful friendships. Mrs. Howie was a devoted Church member and leaves a legacy of faith for her surviving children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Mr. Michael Korzyniowski, 77, died on May 30. A member and deacon of the Halifax, Nova Scotia, congregation in Canada, he is survived by his wife, Judy; a daughter and son-in-law; and two grandchildren. Mr. Korzyniowski loved reading and researching many topics and had a wealth of knowledge, and he also enjoyed spending time in the kitchen, cooking or baking with all the latest gadgets. He was most loved by the brethren for his dedication to the Work of God and his service to the congregation and care for the members. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Dr. Robert H. Miller, Jr., 89, died on June 5 after a brief illness. Dr. Miller received his Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry and Mathematics in 1965 from Ohio University and immediately

joined the Chemistry Department of Southern University at Baton Rouge. Over the next 50 years, Dr. Miller played a major role in the enhancement of undergraduate and graduate chemical education. He served as Chair of Chemistry for eight years and Dean of Sciences for 16 years, advising or co-advising more than 40 M.S. students, coauthoring several papers in the areas of gas chromatography and nuclear magnetic resonance, and serving on multiple dissertation committees in Environmental Toxicology. Dr. Miller retired in 2015 and in 2017 was granted the status of Dean Emeritus. He is survived by Cathern, his wife of 60 years; one sister; and many nieces and nephews. Dr. Miller was baptized in 2014 and was an active member of the Baton Rouge, Louisiana, congregation, where his fellowship, stories, wisdom, humor, and encouraging sermons will be greatly missed.

Mrs. Linda Mohammed-Sookdeo, 62, of the San Fernando, Trinidad, congregation, died August 20, 2025. She had a gentle and soft-spoken nature but was resolute when it came to responding to and sticking to the truth. She started responding to God's call in the late 1980s, completed the Worldwide Church of God's Bible correspondence course in 1991, and was eventually baptized in 2002. She met her husband, Keith, in 1985, and they were married in 2000. Though they never had children of their own, she fondly cared for the little ones in the congregation. Her husband Keith serves as a deacon in Trinidad. Elder David Grant officiated at her funeral.

Mr. Thomas Mumbere, 90, of the Fort Portal, Western Uganda, congregation, died peacefully at his home on July 24. Mr. Mumbere started learning the truth in 1988 through the *Plain Truth* magazine founded by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. He was stunned by the sign of Jesus Christ's Messiahship as declared in Matthew 12:38–40. This inspired him to give up Catholicism, and he started keeping the weekly Sabbath at home. He and two sons were baptized in 2011, and he served as Church Committee Chairperson until his death. Mr. Mumbere carried civil service responsibilities in Fort Portal for many years and retired in 1998. Following retirement, he managed a tree nursery project until his stroke in 2025. He was a loving and kind husband to his wife of 63 years, Regina, and a parent of twelve children and many grandchildren. Besides family, he will be missed by many friends and especially by members of the Fort Portal congregation.

Mrs. Kathy Nelson, 62, died on January 9. Mrs. Nelson was a positive person who left a lasting memory on everyone she knew. She will be greatly missed by her family and friends. Despite a challenging health trial, she remained positive right up to her final moments. Her funeral was conducted by Elder Anthony Mew. Mrs. Nelson attended the Brisbane congregation in Australia.

Mrs. Rollande Therrien, 98, went to sleep on June 17 after a long and fulfilling life. Born in the province of Quebec, Canada, in 1928, she moved to Alberta with her husband, Charles, in 1956. They settled on a farm, where she used her talents as a seamstress and cook as they raised four children. After they relocated to Edmonton, she was called into the Church and was baptized in 1973. She was active in the congregation and served in whatever capacity was open to her. A social butterfly and always full of fun, Mrs. Therrien loved to fellowship, and the Feast of Tabernacles was her favorite time of the year. She brought mirth to all those around her. Mrs. Therrien is survived by three children, six grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Lola Tolman, 81, died February 21. She and her husband, Burl Tolman, were longtime members, going back to the Worldwide Church of God days. They were married for 60 years before he died in 2023. She is survived by her daughter, Michelle Greenwood; her two sons, Ernest and George Tolman, and their spouses; and 18 grandchildren. A third son, Theodore, predeceased his parents. Mrs. Tolman was a "grandma" to all the children in the congregation and often had a child in her arms. She was a true servant, always available to extend gracious help when needed, and she will be greatly missed by all, including the Boise, Idaho, congregation.

Ms. Marcella "Marci" Walton, 77, died May 27 after having attended God's Church for more than 55 years. She was baptized in 1971 and was known far and wide, as she often traveled for the Feast, especially to France. Both at Feasts and at home, she shared her love of clog dancing, actively participating in groups in both California and Ohio for 36 years. Over the past few years, she was tested with health challenges that served to deepen her commitment to God; she often expressed that by exclaiming, "This has been a real wake-up call. It's time to get serious!" She was determined to make it back to services by Pentecost, having had major surgery just a few weeks earlier—and she did, brightening the Holy Day with her bubbly personality, smiles, hugs, and joyful gratitude to God. Ms. Walton is survived by a daughter and two grandsons, as well as by many friends and brethren, including the Columbus, Ohio, congregation, all of whom will miss her greatly.

Mr. Victor Raymond Weekes, 78, of the Chaguanas, Trinidad, congregation, died July 6, 2025, after a brief illness. His introduction to the truth came when someone handed him Mr. Armstrong's book *God Speaks Out on the New Morality*. He started reading it that same night and "could not put it down." He eventually wrote for more material and started listening to the *World Tomorrow* radio broadcast, which led him to study the Bible much more intently. He was baptized in May 1969. In his later years of increasing aches and pains, he strove never to miss services, activities, and the Feast of Tabernacles. He loved

cooking and enjoyed inviting brethren over to his lodging for a meal or two during the Feast. Over the years, he did many different jobs to provide for his family. His death came just days after celebrating his 57th wedding anniversary. In addition to his wife, Beulah, he is survived by eight children—four of whom are baptized members of the Church—and thirteen grandchildren.

Mr. Melvin Eugene Wiedeman, 72, died on June 7, 2025, after a valiant battle with serious illness. He was baptized in 2009. Mr. Wiedeman was known for his ready smile and warm handshake. He told many funny stories as he enjoyed having fellowship with his brethren at services. He is survived by his wife, Mary Wiedeman, and by three sisters. He was a part of

the Little Rock, Arkansas, congregation, and a graveside funeral service was conducted by Pastor Phil West.

Mr. Bill Williams, 80, died June 7 at his residence. He was retired from Wells Lamont, where he had worked as a leather cutter. Baptized in 1968, he was a longtime member of the Church of God and served God's people for decades, first as a deacon and then as an elder. Mr. Williams was preceded in death by his parents and one brother, and he is survived by his loving wife of 54 years, Verlee Williams; two daughters, Rebecca Williams and Kennitha (Dan) Taylor; six grandchildren; and three sisters. Mr. Williams will also be greatly missed by the Hattiesburg, Mississippi, congregation.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. Rick and Evelyn Bordonaro celebrated their **60th wedding anniversary** on May 7. The couple were presented with a cake, card, and crystal clock at a surprise dinner party. They are longtime members of God's Church, baptized in the early 1970s. Their love and devotion to God and each other have been exemplary. They have two children, two grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. Mr. and Mrs. Bordonaro were ordained deacon and deaconess in 1975, and he was ordained an elder in 2016. They have faithfully served God's people in the Warner Robins, Georgia, congregation for decades.

Demetri Broesamle and Emily Crockett were united in marriage in Mineola, Texas, on November 9, 2025, Mr. Marshall Moluf officiating. Demetri is the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Broesamle of the Baltimore, Maryland, congregation, and Emily is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. David Crockett of the Big Sandy, Texas, congregation, where the new couple also attends.

Congratulations to **Mr. and Mrs. Herb and Jacquie Ellis** of the Calgary, Alberta, congregation in Canada, who celebrated their **50th wedding anniversary** on June 12. The brethren honored them with a cake after services on the Sabbath. Mr. Ellis serves as the minister for Calgary, Lethbridge, and the southern part of Alberta.

On Sunday, July 12, **Joseph Henderson and Katie Hart** entered into the marriage covenant. Mr. Alex Pomictier officiated, and family and friends witnessed the outdoor ceremony. Celebration continued with an indoor reception featuring a meal and games. Mr. and Mrs. Henderson attend the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation.

Kaleb Johnson and Kezia Ciesielka were united in marriage on April 19 in Summerfield, North Carolina, in the presence of family and friends. The father of the bride officiated the wedding. The groom is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Johnson, deacon and wife from the Huntsville, Alabama, congregation,

and the bride is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Wyatt Ciesielka, pastor and wife from the Raleigh, North Carolina, area. The happy couple attends the Richland, Washington, congregation.

On May 14, 2026, **Johann Daniel Rangel and Harmony Aria Jewel Talbott** were joined in marriage in a formal ceremony in La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico. Pastor Cristian Orrego officiated the ceremony. Family and friends attended the wedding, and the reception dinner, speeches, dances, and music made for joyous memories for the new couple and their family and friends. The newlyweds attend the congregation in La Paz, Mexico.

On June 5, **Mr. and Mrs. Mike and Amy Wood** celebrated their **50th wedding anniversary**. The occasion was recognized by the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation after services the following day, with cake and a card signed by the brethren. Their love and loyalty to each other and their Creator continue to be an example to admire.

The Cost of Withheld Forgiveness

Years ago, as I was visiting an older gentleman in his home, he shared something that shocked me. He described a falling out with his son and said he simply could not forgive how his son had treated him unless that son gave him an apology. It was, he believed, impossible.

He mentioned a passage in Scripture that, sadly, he had misunderstood: “If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). The older gentleman had interpreted this passage as an absolute condition: that *if* his son apologized and repented, *then and only then* could he forgive. Other key scriptures, however, demonstrate this not to be the case. For instance, we read, “Then Peter came to Him [Jesus] and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’” (Matthew 18:21). And Jesus answered, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” (v. 22).

Was Jesus revealing the upper limit to our forgiveness to be precisely 490 times—tracking every apology received or withheld? Or was He, instead, using a figure of speech, explaining how our forgiveness should be abundant—so much so that we lose count? Scripture provides this guiding principle: “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38). We should offer mercy lavishly and forgive even before an apology.

I couldn’t help but consider with a heavy heart this man’s lost opportunities for laughter, times of joy, shared experiences, making memories, and building natural bonds that should be part of every father-son relationship. It struck me

that God’s word is clear about who our sins are truly “against.” King David of Israel lamented after his grievous sins of taking the life of Uriah and committing adultery with Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba, and Scripture records his cry of repentance: “Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge” (Psalm 51:4).

Yes, we may offend others, treat them wrongly, or harm them in some way—but our sins are always an affront to our Creator, so we should never allow relational conflicts to develop a root of bitterness in us. “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled” (Hebrews 12:14–15). The danger of withholding forgiveness is corruption of character and poisoning of the human heart.

Moreover, God states plainly that those who will not forgive others will have God’s forgiveness withheld from them: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14–15).

Many years have passed since I met that older gentleman. I don’t know if he and his son ever achieved reconciliation, but such lost time is a cost too high for any real or perceived offense. Don’t let this happen to you or someone you love. Do all you can to be reconciled to others—and, most of all, “be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

—Adam J. West